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MOUTHS FILLED WITH SONG:  
BRITISH REFORM JUDAISM THROUGH THE LENS OF ITS MUSIC

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Theology and Religion,

Durham University

2014

# ABSTRACT

The Movement for Reform Judaism [MRJ] - has been undergoing substantial changes in its style and patterns of worship. The introduction of a new prayer book has been accompanied by a pronounced focus on the music of the various synagogues, as a key element in the re-envisioning of prayer and spirituality in 21st century congregations. These have taken place within the context of the wider context of synagogue renewal, which surfaced first in the USA as Synagogue 2000 (now Synagogue 3000), entailing study, reflection and implementation of a variety of different changes in the hope of attracting and retaining Jews in synagogue services.

This thesis focuses on the relationship between forms of liturgical and ritual music and patterns of spirituality and identity within the UK Reform Jewish world during a period of significant social change. ‘Getting the music right’ is, for some, a major aspect in synagogal renewal and commands a central place in the focus on Judaism into the twenty-first century. Focusing on attitudes towards and experiments with music afford a distinctive manner to access the complexities involved in the interplay of diverse community traditions and contemporary pressures for change.

The complexities of this examination are mirrored in the interdisciplinary perspective of this thesis, as it encompasses the theoretical resources of theological, historical, and social scientific disciplines. Through the historical expansion of the movement, and the synagogues in which I have engaged in ethnographic research, we will note the shifts in movement and synagogal musical cultures, each affording a unique perspective on music in worship. Each helps to elucidate a little bit what constitutes the perspectives and preoccupations of the Anglo-Reform Jewish world.

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## **Declaration**

This thesis is based on research solely undertaken by the author. No part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree at Durham University or at any other university.

## **Copyright**

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

## Acknowledgements

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I want to thank my supervisors Professor Seth Kunin, who drew me to Durham, and whose premature departure to another university did not stop him from continuing to support me, and Dr. Marcus Pound, who always encouraged me and established structures with me. I also want to thank Professor Douglas Davies for his assistance.

I want to thank Gerald Stern for translating scribbles into diagrams and all of my friends who helped in large ways and small.

And finally, a big thanks to my dogs who always reminded me to stop, stretch, eat, play, laugh, cuddle, and sleep.

# TRANSLITERATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

For transliterations, I have generally followed the “URJ Transliteration Guidelines and Master Word List Prepared by Debra Hirsch Corman and Rabbi Hara Person February 1, 2001, as it was helpful and comprehensive. Where titles or quotes conflicted, I retained the transliteration of origin.

On occasions, I use Yiddish/Ashkenazi transliterations, particularly when I wanted to impart that particular *ta'am*, flavour, that only such spellings can.

Upon the first use of a Hebrew or Yiddish word or expression, I have translated it within the text.

# DEDICATION

מִינן טאַטע האָא געוואָלט זיין אויף מיין דאָקטאָר-סיום

My father wanted to be there...

I finished this on the day of his first *yahrzeit* and dedicate it to him, *tatenyu vremeleh*, Abraham Borts, who gave me my love of music and of *Yiddishkeit*.

# CHAPTER ONE - OVERTURE

## 1.1 Genesis of an Idea

When I first began this thesis, I had intended to focus on questions to do with music, identity and Jewishness, understanding these axes in the context of the creation of the sacred in the Reform Jewish world.

At the same time, I began working as a part-time rabbi at a small synagogue, which had engaged me primarily for the purpose, as they put it, of offering musically-rich and attractive services. I had begun as well my very leisurely gambol through cantorial training, and wished to share this with my congregation. After all, I had succeeded someone who believed in ‘thin’ application of religion, leaving many craving a thicker, more ‘Jewish’ entity. I began to add some melodies to hitherto declaimed passages, introduced some others of the movement’s standard pieces, and music I thought both better captured the essence of certain prayers and was easier to sing.

The result was contentious, to say the least, which I could not understand. Hadn’t attendance at services increased? Were people not happier to have a melodic rabbi? Why engage someone like me if they really did not want musical development? After all, this was the core modification that all researchers indicated made the difference between spiritually satisfying religious services, and those which were unedifying and stultifying?

And thus, my attention turned toward a deeper understanding of the ‘this is our music’ syndrome, its ontology and dissemination, and the impact of musical change on the UK Reform world.

## 1.2 Declining Appearances

Those of us working in synagogues have noted an increasing decline in attendance, affiliation and interest. During my almost forty year career as a Rabbi and Jewish educator, I have traversed the generations, between those for whom the synagogue was the second most

important building in their lives, after their homes, and those for whom the synagogue is one of a number of spaces of interest for other hobbies and pursuits.

Changes in patterns of attachment to organized religion have been cogently described in such studies as those of Wuthnow<sup>1</sup> and Bellah,<sup>2</sup> and although most of these revolved around the North American situation, British Jews are fond of stating that ‘what happens in the USA today will happen in Britain in 20 years’ time.’ There has been until recently very little research conducted within Anglo-Jewry, and, as Jews here read themselves into North American studies, they both consciously and perhaps unwittingly, model themselves on North American patterns.

A seminal work examining the problem of declining participation in religious life concluded that the nature of public worship was the reason. In his book entitled *The Art of Public Prayer: Not For Clergy Only*, Larry Hoffman wrote that “This is a book for...Jews and Christians...who find themselves by habit or inclination in church or synagogue on holy days at least, and who wonder afterwards, given the utter failure of the proceedings to speak convincingly to their lives, why they bothered.”<sup>3</sup> Hoffma, a Reform rabbi and Professor of Liturgy instigated a partnership with Conservative Rabbi Dr Ron Wolfson, a Professor of Education, which saw the establishment in 1995 of S2K. It was a ten year project which “... helps synagogues do their own work of strengthening themselves as spiritual centers... where deepening congregants’ sense of spiritual community is the mission of the synagogue...; where... the sacred space of congregational life will lead everyone involved...to sense the reality of that ultimate presence we call God.”<sup>4</sup> They drew up guidelines to facilitate

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Hoffmann, *The Art of Public Prayer: Not For Clergy Only*. (Washington DC: The Pastoral Press, 1988), viii.

<sup>4</sup> Synagogue 2000, Itinerary For Change, *Sacred Community/Kehillah Kedoshah*. <http://www.synagogue3000.org/files/SacredCommunity.pdf>, Revised 2001, xii.



processes of change that would, among other alterations, ensure compelling worship services and dynamic synagogues.<sup>5</sup>

S2K became Living Judaism in the UK. One of the synagogues I studied was a Living Judaism synagogue, whilst another was inspired by it through their American rabbi. These experiments all derived from the American experience; indeed, much deferential attention is paid to the USA in general. But rates of affiliation and attachment are cultural. Although Hoffman claimed that “Congregations barely survive in Europe, where unchurched atheism is the norm, and where Jews identify primarily as an ethnic enclave. By contrast, America, which has always made religion central, is undergoing an unprecedented spirituality boom,”<sup>6</sup> paradoxically, in America, where religion is a central aspect of life,<sup>7</sup> fewer people join synagogues.<sup>8</sup> Synagogues in the UK offer burial schemes with their memberships, one reason why there is a greater uptake of membership; moreover, the UK is both a more ‘traditional’ community, and one with fewer other options for Jewish expression. Thus, there is a greater

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<sup>5</sup> Educational and organizational experiments were associated arenas for synagogue revitalization. See Isa Aron, *Becoming a Congregation of Learners: Learning as a Key to Revitalizing Congregational Life* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000); Isa Aron, *The Self-Renewing Congregation: Organizational Strategies for Revitalizing Congregational Life* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2002); Sidney Schwartz, *Finding a Spiritual Home: How a New Generation of Jews Can Transform the American Synagogue, 2000* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Hoffmann, *Synagogue 2000: Lessons for the Future*. Autumn 2004. <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadPublication.cfm?PublicationID=5282.10>. I disagree, as one who has lived in both countries. Much hinges around the definition of ‘ethnic.’ Geoffrey Alderman speaks to this topic, and notes, “The Board of Deputies of British Jews has consistently opposed the inclusion of a Jewish category in the question on ethnic origins in the...census.” Geoffrey Alderman, “British Jewry: Religious Community or Ethnic Minority?” in *in the New Europe*, ed. Jonathan Webber (London: Littman Library, 1994), 191.

<sup>7</sup> Berger et al have noted that “...it is useful to let go of two widely held notions. The first is that religion is part of “American exceptionalism.” America is indeed “exceptional,” but with regard to religion it is very much like the rest of the world – namely, very religious. The exception is Europe.” Peter Berger, Grace Davie and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2008), 9 – 10.

<sup>8</sup> Rates in the UK are given as 74%, according to the IJPR [Institute for Jewish Policy Research] in 2010 and were 46% in 2003, according to a Harris poll. .

need for synagogues as ‘points of contact’ for Jewish expression than in a country offering extensive scope for Jewish religious and cultural life expression, as Endelman notes, there is in England “...no counterpart to the rich nexus of nonreligious, extrasynagogal organizations....that have dotted the American Jewish scene...”<sup>9</sup>

All of this notwithstanding, membership is not the same as engagement. When I first began my career, one synagogue in the UK with which I worked could see attendances of up to 20% of its membership on a Shabbat at which there was no ‘*simcha*’ [a joyous occasion such as a Bat or Bar mitzvah]. In a recent small poll of percentages of attendance at Shabbat services in the MRJ, my colleagues, including the current rabbi of my former synagogue, reported attendances at ordinary Shabbat services of around 5% of the total membership, with rates up to 7 - 10% in small groups with a part-time rabbi, whose visit engendered a sense of occasion.<sup>10</sup>

From 20% to 5% is a steep decrease in a 30 year period, but 20% still represents a very small proportion of a synagogue membership.

### **1.3 Who, What, and How?**

This thesis constitutes an historical and contemporary ethnographic examination of the development, constitution of, function, and response to the musical heritage of the British Reform world. I will investigate the claims that musical stagnation is the core reason for declining turnout at Shabbat services, and that conversely, musical revitalization is the vital stratagem for increasing attendance. I will do this through engaged participation in services of MRJ synagogues and through candid conversations both with those who design the musical shape of their services, and those who participate in the offerings. This will provide a picture of the musical, and through that, the religious life, of UK Reform Jews. Although I follow Jonathan Webber in avoiding too composite a view of the Reform ‘community’ because “...the characteristic units of today’s Jewish world may not always be tightly knit ‘communities’ but aggregates of people whose links with each other are not necessarily self-

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<sup>9</sup> Todd M. Endelman, *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History 1656 – 1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 206.

<sup>10</sup> Based on anecdotal evidence garnered in discussions with colleagues and laity.

evident,”<sup>11</sup> this is a portrait of some people who associate with Reform synagogues and also provides some hermeneutical hints about the Reform movement itself.

There are a few such examinations – for example, two brief ethnographies of a synagogue in New York City famous for its musical Friday night services<sup>12</sup>, and another ethnographical study of music and identity in synagogues in the Boston area.<sup>13</sup>

I commence with an examination of the history of the music of the newly emergent Reform synagogue through to the present day, and include as well aspects of the liturgical history of the movement. Having considered the history of the use of music in the Reform movement, I then consider how the musical heritage was disseminated throughout the constituent synagogues, honing in on the themes of music and change through ethnographic research in three disparate synagogues. As I concentrate on current trends in music and what this reveals about the movement and its spiritual and Jewish character, I will offer some concluding observations, a prolegomenon concerning the future of progressive Judaism in England and some hopefully helpful recommendations.

I have limited my observations to Sabbath services in the Reform movement, with its common history and shared prayer book [*siddur*], although I do include comments comparing the trends in the North American Reform movement [URJ – Union for Reform Judaism], Liberal Judaism [LJ]<sup>14</sup> and the varying musical worlds of other Anglo Jewish movements, when such comparisons provide important contextualization. And I have engaged in ethnographic research in three synagogues, West London Synagogue, Sinai Synagogue and Finchley Reform Synagogue.

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<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Webber, “Introduction,” in *Jewish Identities*, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Shaul Kelner, *A Charismatic Community: Congregation B’nai Jeshurun*, <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=4192> and S3K Report *Spirituality at B’nai Jeshurun: Reflections of Two Scholars and Three Rabbis*, <http://www.synagogue3000.org/files/S3KReportBJNovember2009.pdf>. April 2009, Number 7.

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey A. Summit, *The Lord’s Song in a Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

<sup>14</sup> Liberal Judaism is the MRJ’s sister progressive movement in the UK.

This thesis is by its nature interdisciplinary, encompassing insights from works in history, ethnomusicology, anthropology, sociology, as well as theology.<sup>15</sup> It is descriptive and analytical, only touching lightly upon theories where theories can illuminate the nature of the phenomena. It will consist of both etic and emic observations.

This particular community previously has not been observed and studied in such a holistic manner, and therefore, in order to understand how it is as it is, it is necessary to describe how it became what it became. My hope is that, as Mary Douglas noted concerning the status of one of her seminars that it “...boosted the exploratory essay to the status of a theory that could be expanded and modified.”<sup>16</sup>

## **1.4 Why Music?**

Music has assumed supreme importance in the continuing core discussions surrounding renewal and regeneration of the prayer life of progressive (and sometimes even mainstream Orthodox<sup>17</sup>) synagogues, musical change the bearer of the hopes and aspirations of creating lively, spiritually engaging services. As Merriam suggests, “...music is a means of understanding peoples and behaviour and as such is a valuable tool in the analysis of culture and society.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Timothy Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life: An Ethnographic Approach* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 19, where he describes a similar interdisciplinary approach, including incorporating “historical depth.”

<sup>16</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, (London: Routledge Classics, 2007) xxvi.

<sup>17</sup> Simon Roker, “It’s not over until the last cantor sings,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, 7 June, 2013, 23.

<sup>18</sup> Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 13.

### 1.4.1 Music and Emotions

Most people relate a subjective, visceral belief on the impact of music on the emotions, which they then universalize. From poetry: “*Du holde Kunst... Hast mich in eine beßre Welt entrückt*,”<sup>19</sup> to psychology, “...music can penetrate the core of our physical being. It can make us weep, or give us intense pleasure. Music, like being in love, can temporarily transform our whole existence,”<sup>20</sup> people derive from their own deeply-felt experiences conclusions about its profound impact on others.

There may be a genetic basis to this conviction. Scientists studying evolution and neurology posit a genetic human basis for musical attraction. Stephen Mithen, for instance, argues that “with the exception of those who suffer from a cognitive deficit, all individuals...are born with an inherent appreciation of music.”<sup>21</sup> He asserts further that there is “...a source of evidence that suggests that music has a developmental, if not evolutionary, priority over language.”<sup>22</sup>

As to how music influences the emotions, there is less agreement, much of the debate revolving around intrinsic and extrinsic properties within music – does emotion lodge within as a property of a piece of music itself, or is meaning construed by the listener.<sup>23</sup> Here again, neuroscience has some insights: “Music appears to mimic some of the features of language and to convey some of the same emotions that vocal communication does... but far more than language, music taps into primitive brain structures involved with motivation, reward, and emotion...”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Franz von Schober, *An Die Musik*, set to music by Franz Schubert.

<sup>20</sup> Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 4.

<sup>21</sup> Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 13.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>23</sup> For some of the debate amongst philosophers, see Peter Kivy, *New Essays on Musical Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music: Understanding a Human Obsession* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007), 191-192.

If this is the thrust of modern science, then our inner convictions about the emotional potency of music are correct and wide-spread and can be taken for granted as we examine the musical culture of Reform Judaism.

### 1.4.2 The Functions of Music

Musical function is explicit in two general contexts, the macro-context, and the micro-context. Through the ensuing historical retrospective, the macro-context describes the manner in which the music employed consciously and determinedly both mimics another genus of music, Western classical, and suppresses its own historically-determined style, thereby delineating the degree of assimilation pursued by the community; as Nettl writes, “The modernized and partially Westernized...music had a function of symbolizing the process of Westernization.”<sup>25</sup> This does not detract from the scholarly consensus regarding the centuries-long nature of Jewish musical appropriation; if, however, we can agree that there has been a universal and enduring style of delivery of Jewish liturgical music in *nusach* [neumes, modes, for prayer chant] and trope, then the degree to which liturgical composers base a composition on this musical legacy, or modify it, or disregard it, can either serve to ease or to bound a community’s religious divergence. This can be achieved by appropriating external music and defining it, through use, as Jewish; reconciling non-Jewish styles with Jewish ones, thus retaining the Jewish in the guise of another; transforming non-Jewish into Jewish music through processes that lead to its functional use within the Jewish context only; appropriating external music with no modification; employing one’s musical vernacular to write music that then functions Jewishly within a service.

Within the micro-context, musical function has been widely discussed. Although not referring specifically to liturgical situations, Merriam compiled a useful list, among which are entertainment, communication, symbolic representation, validating religious rituals, and contributing to the continuity, stability, and integration of a group.<sup>26</sup> Hoffman asserts that “Music...gathers us together as a community, develops emotional moods, provides quiet time

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<sup>25</sup> Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 252.

<sup>26</sup> Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, 219 – 227.

for meditation [!] lets us sing in great elation, interprets sacred texts, and so on.”<sup>27</sup> And Jonathan Friedman argues that, “...all synagogue songs can be categorized according to these four uses: disciplinary, cohesive, revitalizing, and euphoric.”<sup>28</sup> These are humanist orientations, that is, they relate what the music does for us. What the three writers share is the notion that music is expressive, inducing generally positive emotional responses; that it serves to cultivate ‘communitas,’ to borrow Turner’s expression, “...community, or even communion of equal individuals...;”<sup>29</sup> and that it is a performative aspect of many religious rites. Throughout the course of a service sometimes one or another aspect may predominate, or there may be simultaneity, as perceived by the individual participants.

What is absent is the explicit expectation that music is a means of conversing with, or cleaving to, the Divine, to God. I will be exploring this in more depth in the concluding chapter.

Music is a somatic phenomenon as well. I am both a singer and a violinist - I enjoy the violin, but the glorious sensation of breath coursing through me, the very semantic of embodiment, derives from singing. “Underlying sung words is an energy derived from the bodily actions of breathing, singing, and collaborative behaviour...;” music connects us to *ruach kol basar* [the breath of all life]. And through this whole body experience, music “...can integrate otherwise divided aspects of an individual, framing inner-otherness...”<sup>30</sup>

Music also may have a dark side, in that it can create discord and disunity; this is mentioned *soto voce* by some authors, then scurried past, but it looms significantly over the ethnography. Alexander Knapp, in an interesting examination of British Jewish music in the

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<sup>27</sup> Lawrence A. Hoffman, “On Swimming, Sound, and Canon,” in *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience*, eds. Lawrence A. Hoffman and Janet R. Walton, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 335.

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan L. Friedmann, *Social Functions of Synagogue Song: A Durkheimian Approach* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), viii.

<sup>29</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 96.

<sup>30</sup> Douglas Davies, *Anthropology and Theology* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 85.

1990s wrote, “curious it is that, in a place of worship, music can be reduced to a weapon...”<sup>31</sup> It may also preclude worship, another subsonic theme in this work. Amnon Shiloah asks, “may there be a conflict of values and interests between musical concepts and basic doctrinal concepts? The point of departure for this lies in the powerful influence wielded by music... its tremendous, overwhelming power... conflicting with purposeful, clear-headed worship.”<sup>32</sup> Music, touted as the medium which enhances prayer can also preclude it. We shall return to that at the end.

As Nettl asserts, “All known cultures accompany religious activity with music,”<sup>33</sup> ‘activity’ a synonym for ‘ritual.’ Musical phases of a service are elements within the larger rhythm, “ritemes,” one of the multifarious Shabbat activities which, in the words of Catherine Bell “...distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities. As such, ritualization is a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a...distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane,’ and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors.”<sup>34</sup> Jewish tradition ascribes the primary ritualization power of “creating and privileging a distinction” to other acts, in particular, the lighting of the candles at the edge of the Shabbat boundary, but, as I will argue, Bell’s statement becomes highly significant in the context of the spatialization of Judaism I note below. For many Reform Jews, it will be a melody such as ‘*Bim Bam*’ or ‘*Mah Tov*’ that will transport them into ‘shabbos mode,’ will assist in the process of ‘enjudiaization.’

This is a fitting segue to the work of Van Gennep and Turner and the part music plays in and out of the liminality. Van Gennep posited that “So great is the incompatibility between the profane and the sacred worlds that a man cannot pass from one to the other without going

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<sup>31</sup> Alexander Knapp, “Aspects of Jewish Music in Contemporary Britain” in *Journal of Synagogue Music*, July/December 1992 Vol XXII Number 2, 41ff. Knapp also supplies some proposals for ameliorating the situation in Britain; sadly, he is one of those this community should have been able to support.

<sup>32</sup> Amnon Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Traditions* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1992), 78.

<sup>33</sup> Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology*, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 74.



through an intermediate stage,”<sup>35</sup> these being “*rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation...to insure a change of condition or passage from one magico-religious or secular group to another...*”<sup>36</sup> In Turner’s formulation, “the...phase of separation comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group...from a set of cultural conditions...”<sup>37</sup> Musical prologues serve to inject alterity, whether a distinction between sacred and profane, defined by Eliade as “two modes of being in the world, two existential situations...”<sup>38</sup> or between the secular environment they have exited, and the Jewish one they have entered.

“During the intervening “liminal” period, the characteristics of the ritual subject...are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or the coming state.”<sup>39</sup> The liminal state is precarious, vague, perhaps even discomfiting. Here, it is the music of the opening passages of the service that propel the attendee into sacred time, Jewish consciousness. Given the tentative nature of the connexion many have with Judaism, one might ask whether some musics facilitate or hinder the passage through liminality. It is also a function of the length and internal structure of a service that this stage may endure for some time; it may also be the resting stage for many in attendance. For others, reconfiguration of the music from ‘liturgical music’ to ‘indigenous music’ may ease them into the third phase.

“In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation) the passage is consummated. The...individual... is in a relatively stable state once more...”<sup>40</sup> If the service has worked, at some point, most of the congregation will be fairly fully detached from their external worlds, and be internally reconfigured historically, ethnically, spiritually, communally, one or all

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<sup>35</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2008), 94.

<sup>38</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. William R. Trask (New York: Harvest/HBJ, 1959), 14.

<sup>39</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

these, as a Jew. Music is by no means the only rite operative in this process; it acts in concert with a host of others. And it likely is not enduring, for, upon reversing the process, doffing Jewish clothes and Jewish Sabbath linguistic conventions, and driving off into the outer world, whatever spell was woven may very well be broken.

### 1.4.3 Music and Synagogue Transformation

The idea that music is a fundamental component in attracting Jews to, or repelling Jews from worship, was at the heart of the burgeoning Reform mission, both on the Continent, and in the UK. In 1842, Charles Kensington Salaman, later a musical director at WLS, gave an address where he stated that: "...serious attention and...devotional feelings...befit a house consecrated to the worship of The Holy One of Israel. Let me...call your attention to the manner in which many sublime and solemn prayers are hurried over... sung to the gayest and most frivolous music...if when a stranger enters our synagogue, is it not humiliating to us that he should witness a system so ill calculated to call forth religious feelings; such an absence of devotion, such indifference, such indecorum and disorder?"<sup>41</sup>

Concurrent with serious theological revision and modifications in Jewish practice,<sup>42</sup> changes attempted to re-present Judaism in manners more harmonious with Christian sensibilities and aesthetics, and to those Jews deeply acculturated in German and English life, including an emphasis on decorum in the service;<sup>43</sup> vernacular and prayers;<sup>44</sup> organ accompaniment;<sup>45</sup> singing Christian hymns; and shorter, edited, services. "Modifications can best be explained in terms of the self-consciousness of middle-class London Jewry in the light of Anglican norms of decorum and sensitivity to the relative laxity of their own

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<sup>41</sup> Cassell, Curtis.. *History of West London Synagogue*. Unpublished manuscript. 1-4.

<sup>42</sup> For a detailed history of Reform Judaism, see Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>43</sup> A traditional *Shabbat* service is characterized by much coming and going; people enter and leave throughout the allotted time. There is a comfortable anarchy, moments people proceed at their own pace, join the *sh'liach tzibbur*, [leader of prayer, whether *chazan*, lay person, or rabbi] or engage in conversation. The ambience has been described as a 'euphonious cacophony.' Shame and self-consciousness about this chaotic and seemingly undignified presentation of divine worship were powerful impetuses for change.

<sup>44</sup> *Shulhan Arukh, Orech Chaim, 101:4*, where it is permitted to pray in any language. However, there was and is a marked preference for Hebrew *lashon kodesh*, [the holy language].

<sup>45</sup> Musical instruments have been proscribed by the rabbis since the destruction of the Temple, as one may break an instrument and, forgetting it is *Shabbat*, attempt to have it fixed. See BT *Beitzah* 36b. Musical instruments were also considered noisy, thus detracting from Sabbath peace.

synagogue services.”<sup>46</sup> Orderly and euphonious musical reparation, addition, and deletion were intended to heal Judaism.

This was not an entirely new phenomenon. As early as the seventeenth century, Salomon da Rossi composed liturgical music that was no different from other Baroque compositions of the day, except for the use of Hebrew. And in a synagogue in Prague, the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service was accompanied by an organ.<sup>47</sup> As Jews began to mingle more freely in the societies in which they lived, musical appropriation became a more purposeful endeavour; ‘getting the music right’ was regarded as a crucial corollary to ‘getting Judaism right’ in a spiritual sense, and making it acceptable both to modernizing Jews and the non-Jewish communities in which they resided. Harmonies, musical form, performance style, all were recast under the reforming enterprise. The result was a dual process of taming: musical domestication enabled the domestication of the Jewish body at prayer. Jewish services, formerly constituting an array of different activities, affective, cognitive, kinetic, social, cultural, religious, with full embodied participation, was reconfigured as a spiritual, but rational, pursuit.

#### **1.4.4 Contemporary Musical Transformation**

Musical transformation features strongly in the proposals of the S3K team. Founder Wolfson wrote, ‘When I am asked the question “is there any one thing that is essential to the creation of a spiritually moving prayer service?” I reply, “There are three things: music, music, music.”’<sup>48</sup> Hoffman and Wolfson visited at least one successful church<sup>49</sup> and various

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<sup>46</sup> Daniel R. Langton, “A Question of Backbone: Contrasting Christian Influences upon the Origins of Reform and Liberal Judaism in England,” *Melilah* 2004/3, 2ff.

<sup>47</sup> For more on the history of Jewish music, see, among others, A.Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1967); Peter Gradenwitz, *The Music of Israel: From the Biblical Era to Modern Times* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1996); M. Rothmueller, *The Music of the Jews: An Historical Appreciation* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1967); Alfred Sendrey, *The Music of the Jews in the Diaspora* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1970).

<sup>48</sup> Ron Wolfson, *The Spirituality of Welcoming: How to Transform Your Congregation Into A Sacred Community* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006), 96 and 110.

<sup>49</sup> A rare indication of conscious appropriation.

synagogues, to see what allows for successful services. They were particularly interested on the Manhattan synagogue Temple B'nei Jeshurun, better known as TBJ or BJ, which attracts thousands of Jews of all ages to its Friday night services and which has 'packaged' its idea under the name 'The TBJ Experience' for use by other synagogues. Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller was part of the team; she developed a musical typology which figures prominently in the work of the *chazan* [cantor] of one of the synagogues I study. The team also developed a Prayer Curriculum with a substantial chapter called 'The Vocabulary of Music,'<sup>50</sup> much of it later incorporated by the American Reform movement into an educational book entitled *Divrei Shir/Words of Song: A Curriculum for the Study of Synagogue Music*. Jewish American singer-songwriters gained new prominence, and wider circulation as they continued to compose and teach the new liturgical works using diverse musical genres.

It is often heuristically asserted that attentiveness to music is the key to spiritual satisfaction, that "...the choice of music... triggers our responses to the prayers, provides the beat of the choreography, and underscores the drama of the worship...it is the most important component of the worship experience."<sup>51</sup> Exploring this postulation within the British Reform Jewish world will answer questions as to force of that declaration, if and how changes have been implemented in the light of it, and what impact it has had on British Reform Jewish worship.

#### **1.4.5 Musical Renewal in the Contemporary Reform World**

There has been a demonstrable increase in attention to music in the realm of Anglo-Reform. In 2008, a group of Liberal and Reform rabbis and students (and I) sat for six weeks with Chazan Jacky Chernett, studying *nusach*. With one exception, we came from progressive synagogues with no history of *nusach*, and were not certain just how much we would subsequently be able to incorporate.

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<sup>50</sup> Synagogue 2000 Itinerary for Change, *Prayer Curriculum*, <http://www.synagogue3000.org/files/PrayerCurriculum2.pdf>, updated September, 2003. 157 – 191.

<sup>51</sup> Wolfson, *Spirituality of Welcoming*, 96.

Chernett was once a member of a Reform synagogue, but left to become a founder member of the Masorti movement.<sup>52</sup> She was the first modern non-Orthodox, and female, *chazan* in the UK. Chernett has a passion for *nusach* and in order to promote *nusach* under the rubric of thoughtful and Jewishly-informed prayer leadership, she founded EAJL, the European Academy for Jewish Liturgy. Chernett believes that *nusach* “isn’t even on the Reform radar;” although some progressive rabbis are learning with her, the overwhelmingly majority of participants in EAJL activities are Masorti.

Of course, *nusach* is only one component of liturgical music in a service, but it is a crucial if one is to know how to ‘*daven*.’ ‘*Daven*’, a Yiddish word of contested origin, is the term given by traditionalists to what they do in *shul* in contradistinction to ‘pray’ or ‘to attend services.’ For those who wish to create a connected and Jewishly-informed atmosphere in *shul* prayer, *davening* offers a different way to present a service. And to *daven* one needs to know *nusach*.

But certainly some change is occurring within the Jewish world, and here and there in Liberal and Reform synagogues, prayers are being chanted, or sung in diverse ways, with a different attitude, than in previous years. In many of those same synagogues, you are also likely to encounter an alternative service, or even the main service on a Friday night, in which guitars are strummed and music written in North America by Jewish liturgical musicians is sung. Between ‘Debbie and *dai dee dai*,’<sup>53</sup> between the ancient prayer modes of Jewish tradition, and contemporary liturgically-tinged pop music, lyrics sometimes in English, the musical palette of the contemporary Jewish world is a diverse one, which fluctuates between desires for return to “tradition” and modern musical tastes consonant with genres of music popular in secular culture.

Music is one of the best lenses through which to peer into the heart of a people, into its very being. And among all of the various indicators of degrees of assimilation and acculturation, a

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<sup>52</sup> Masorti is the name of the Conservative movement in the UK. Chernett works at a Masorti *shul*.

<sup>53</sup> Either the wordless prayer melodies favoured by Chassidim, *niggunim*, or a ‘neo-Chassidic syllabic insertion’ [phrase coined by Dr. Chani Smith and myself], attached to an existing melody to allude to the *niggunic* tradition.

musical tradition offers the most concrete. Music is and has been at the heart of conflicts and affirmations concerning the essence of being Jewish.

### 1.4.6 Jewishness of Music

It is perhaps an appropriate occasion to raise the question, ‘what is Jewish music?’ The preeminent advocate of the notion of an historically and culturally pure Jewish music was Abraham Tzvi Idelsohn.<sup>54</sup> His conclusions have been contested and rejected, although one cannot ignore his contributions to Jewish musicography. Although Eric Werner dismissed queries concerning the characteristics of Jewish music as “eternally silly”, in a thesis on liturgical Jewish music, it is appropriate briefly to examine this.

Discussions about the essence of Jewish music often revolve around putative inherent characteristics, such as attachment to minor keys, or styles, such as klezmer, or function, or some intangible essence that somehow describes the ‘Jewish soul’ or ‘Jewish predicament.’<sup>55</sup> As the grandchild of eastern European Jews, I inherited musical styles and tastes from that part of the world, that is, music often in minor or minor-like keys and modes, music which wails and laments (the *krech*) accompanied by violin and clarinet. However, if one were to turn to the music of the Western Ashkenazi and Sephardi worlds, one finds music in major keys, non-melismatic, and of a more buoyant characteristic. And further, much of what is perceived to be emblematic Eastern European music can be found within the *tzigayner* musical heritage, indicating fluid interconnections between peoples and their musics. It is even unclear as to how unique the *nusach* is, the music most commonly presented as uniquely

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<sup>54</sup> For some bibliographical background on Idelsohn, see Jehoash Hirshberg, *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine 1880 – 1948* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 11ff.

<sup>55</sup> In a BBC One programme entitled ‘Broadway Musicals: A Jewish Legacy’, broadcast November, 2013, one interviewee maintained that Jewish music is in the minor key, because of Jewish suffering, and others simply played snippets of Broadway songs and asked rhetorically, ‘Does this not sound Jewish?’ These assertions emerge from the Eastern European Jewish musical experience, which is hegemonic in the American Jewish world, and thus, assumed to be paradigmatic Jewish music, and from ignorance. People acquaint the quintessential Jewish sound with one of the modes, the *Ahavah Rabbah*, or *Freygish*, mode, when, in fact, one of the other modes, *Adonai Malach*, is in the major tonality.

Jewish, given its resemblance to Greek modes and Arab *makamot*. As Werner has written, “There was a constant borrowing and lending.”<sup>56</sup>

I would now reject all such essentialist statements as to what is Jewish music and turn to cultural functional explanations. One favoured definition is that proffered by Curt Sachs: “Jewish music is music made by Jews for Jews as Jews.” There is merit in Sachs’ statement, in that it excises from the discourse the problem of Mendelssohn and Mahler, who, whatever one claims about their respective Jewishness, did not compose as Jews for Jews. But it is a problematic statement in that it omits music such as the contrafacta favoured by the Chassidic community, which derives from non-Jewish sources, nor the earliest music of Anglo-Reform, composed by a non-Jew for Jews as Jews.

Baron suggests that Jewish music is music “strongly associated with Jewish culture” and finally, having examined many angles of the debate, offers what he calls a “working definition: Jewish music is music that serves Jewish purposes.”<sup>57</sup> This is a helpful definition, as Jewish music has differed from culture to culture, as Brailiou asks with regard to the concept of ‘folk’ in folk music, “...what exactly does it mean? The nation as delimited by its political frontiers? Or the demographic units enclosed within those frontiers...Or does it imply race [sic], revealed by striking common traits stretching beyond the national territories..?”<sup>58</sup> If these are frustrating questions for studies of French, Italian, Chinese or Hungarian music, how much the more so for the Jews, who have lived dispersed amongst many other nations, religion and ethnic groups throughout their history? Mendelssohn, wary of the calumnies of such as Wagner concerning the derivative, non-inventive nature of Jewish composers,<sup>59</sup> quotes musicologist Gerald Abraham’s remark that certain music “...is Jewish

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<sup>56</sup> Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge - The Interdependence of Liturgy and Music in Synagogue and Church during the first Millennium* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1959), xviii.

<sup>57</sup> Emanuel Rubin and John H. Baron, *Music in Jewish History and Culture* (Sterling Heights, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 2006)

<sup>58</sup> Constanin Brailoiu, *Problems of Ethnomusicology*, trans. A.L. Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1.

<sup>59</sup> For more on this theme as a pervasive theme in Christian views on the Jews, see Ruth HaCohen, *The Music Libel Against the Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).



in that it belongs to no particular country.”<sup>60</sup> This is an anti-essentialist argument par excellence – Jewish music is the music of the worlds.

Having rejected essentialist characterizations, we may wish to transmute this further, from a consideration of the nature of the function of the music, to a consideration of its diversity, a corollary to the assertion that there is no Jewish people, but rather, Jewish peoples, and that each of those peoples is constituted by individuals who may also come from various different backgrounds. Jewish music is powerfully and determinedly multicultural, so Jewish music might also be ‘music that a Jew feels expresses some important aspect of Jewish experience’ whether identity, spirituality, fun, history, or Israel, and that, in the synagogue, although different Jews may experience different melodies differently, they will all have some sense of which melody best marks the boundaries of their Jewish identity at that point, in that boundaried space and time.

Incorporating the issue of prayers and meaning in prayer would then refine our definition to:

*Jewish liturgical music is music that individual Jews in synagogues feel best captures and expresses the essence of the prayer and/or experience of that moment.*

## **1.5 Research Methodology and Issues**

The historical segments are drawn from my own original research into primary source material from the archives of the West London Synagogue and the Reform movement, as well as histories and interviews. Although the music of WLS is mentioned within other corpuses of work, there is no other complete history of the movement and its music..

My field research consisted of interviews and participant-observer reflections in three synagogues with different musical traditions, through interviews conducted amongst three core groups:

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<sup>60</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn, “On the Jewish Presence in Nineteenth-Century European Musical Life,” in *Modern Jews and Their Musical Agendas: Studies in Contemporary Jewry, An Annual*, IX (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7. Quoting Gerald Abraham, *Slavonic and Romantic Music. Essays and Studies* (London: 1968), 99

1. *The decision makers*, which differed in each synagogue, whether a committee, the Board of Governors or Council, musical professional(s), voluntary musicians, the rabbis, and/or individual lay leaders, anyone, regardless of knowledge, who had some authority over or ownership of their repertoire..
2. *Various attendees*. I both approached people and did random sampling, but I sense that I probably got a specialized group of people, many of whom knew me or knew of me. I also had to enlist the support of the rabbis, asking them to announce my project and encourage people to respond to my pleas for subjects. It was not as easy to find people to interview as I had hoped, although people informally like to air their opinions about the music of their services.
3. *Cross-over observers* – people from one of the synagogues visiting one of the others, or people attending with me two or more of the synagogues.

I was interested in how musical use in a particular synagogue impacted on different types of members, so this was not a general study of all Jews who might or might not be attracted to, or repelled from, a service at a particular synagogue. Many of the people I reached were amongst the groups I shall designate regulars, irregular regulars, and regular irregulars. I found in each setting the name of at least one person who was an irregular or non-attender, but inevitably, this is a study of what is happening within three congregations and the impact on active or semi-active members, those that Cohen and Eisen termed ‘moderately affiliated. This is a piece of qualitative inquiry; “...qualitative thought is ubiquitous in human affairs, a pervasive aspect of daily life.”<sup>61</sup> I engaged with some people in great depth “...seeking, in the widened sense of the term in which it encompasses very much more than talk, to converse with them..;”<sup>62</sup> and in order to honour these thoughtful conversations, I have opted to retain the narrative voice of each individual, rather than organize them topically.<sup>63</sup> The variety and seriousness of the responses allows for some broader understanding of how the changes are affecting presence at services. I hope that, as Heilman wrote, “By framing and editing them,

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<sup>61</sup> Elliot W. Eisner, *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 5.

<sup>62</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 13.

<sup>63</sup> In this I have been inspired by Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: Touchstone, 1978), *lehavdil*, whose ethnography reads like literature.

by juxtaposing and glossing them, they become more than repetitions of conversations; they become ethnographically descriptive.”<sup>64</sup>

There was one conundrum. The MRJ is a small movement of forty-four synagogues of varying sizes and as each synagogue has its own unique imprint, disguising them is impossible. I have, therefore, retained the names of the synagogues and their professionals. Each of the lay leaders and congregants interviewed has been anonymized unless permission was given to cite them by name. I opted to omit footnoting every instance of an interview.

There are certain challenges in researching synagogue music. For one, Jews have rules about both the use of electrical equipment on the Sabbath and writing on the Sabbath, which precluded capturing the whole of the atmosphere through recording and video devices nor through copious real-time notes. However, given that Reform Judaism is not as strict in these regards, employing microphones in the service for instance, the rabbis allowed me some discretion as long as I was sensitive to those around me. Two of the synagogues I have studied stream their services online which allowed me to hone my observations at a later time, and in the third I have been allowed to conceal myself to be able to take notes. I have had to rely on my memory of the events; the music of a service unfolds in time and space, its impact felt through the interactions and reactions of those leading and participating in the liturgical moment, and I had to gaze around and carry back home with me my impressions. Only multiple visits gave some thickness to my recollections.

I also invited people to accompany me on visits. I brought knowledgeable friends to two of the synagogues I studied, and then asked for their comments contrasting and comparing the services. I brought members from one synagogue to visit another, again, asking for reflections on the similarities and differences. And finally, I asked people I was interviewing who had visited other synagogues to offer me their comments. This widened my perspective. I have termed this ‘cross-over observation.’

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<sup>64</sup> Samuel C. Heilman, “Holding Firmly with an Open Hand: Life in Two Conservative Synagogues,” in *Jews in the Center: Conservative Synagogues and Their Members*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 103.

I have been a frequent attendee and employee at all three synagogues over a number of years, as well as being completely conversant with the *siddur* and theology of Reform services, hence, I did not have a ‘learning curve.’ I was participating in rituals in which I would normally participate and with which I would identify at the time of their performance. I am also a performer of such rituals in my own right, and thus bring my own expertise, expectations, and biases, and aesthetic and spiritual judgments to the situation. This is a heightened form of participant-observer research, to be an ethnographer in one’s native land, the complexities of the situation strikingly chronicled by Samuel Heilman and Jeffrey Summit.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Samuel C. Heilman, *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), x – xi and Jeffrey A. Summit, *The Lord’s Song in a Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000),

# CHAPTER TWO – REFORM JUDAISM: FROM TEMPORALITY TO SPATIALITY, FROM OBLIGATION TO CHOICE

## 2.1 Overview

This musical account unfolds within a Jewish environment that has been in a process of transformation from the temporal to the spatial, that is, from the Judaism of practice to the Judaism of attendance. If ‘space’ is the primary performance arena of contemporary Jewish life, then what happens in space is deeply significant.

## 2.2 The Separate Sphere Known as ‘Religion’: The Place of Ritual Practice

Change in England was less radical than in Germany<sup>66</sup> but all progressive movements in one way or another applied the epigram of Judah Leib Gordon from his poem, “*Kotso shel yud*” (The Tip of the [letter]Yud) “Be a mensch (person, human being) on the street and a Jew in the home.” Whereas traditionally the Jewish emphasis was on Judaism as a ‘way of life’<sup>67</sup>, this oft-cited quote from Gordon echoes the emergence in the Christian world of a rent between the religious and the secular realms. Christianity developed a more ‘locative-centric’ emphasis, of Christianity performed within the confines of a church, limited to specific spaces, or, as Abraham Joshua Heschel remarked, a religion concerned more with the

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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 – 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 100ff.

<sup>67</sup> There is no specific word in Hebrew for ‘religion’, as such a word would indicate a rupture between sacred and profane. In modern Hebrew, the word דת [dati] is now signifies ‘religious’ Jews, a usage which develops in rabbinical Judaism; the word derives from a root meaning ‘law’, and may better be understood as describing people who accept ‘the law’, and not as equivalent to the English sense of ‘religion.’ For more on ‘dat’, see Philologos “Dat’s Dat,” *Forward*, March 1, 2002.

sanctification of space than of time<sup>68</sup>. In progressive religious Jewish life, there was widespread acceptance of this particular and dominant Christian model.<sup>69</sup>

### 2.3 Informed Choice; Ritual Meaningfulness

The maxim of Reform practise is ‘informed choice,’ a now ubiquitous expression rooted in liberal philosophy. Traditional Jews either accept *chiyyuv*, the obligation to practice, or believe that ideally they should.<sup>70</sup> Although there are Reform Jews who engage in personal, non-communal, home-based practices,<sup>71</sup> ritual observances are engaged in when they prove meaningful, often with reference to how this will contribute to ‘*tikkun olam*’ [repairing the world], the contemporary expression for Jewish social justice commitment. UK Jews now employ the word *mitzvah* as a ‘good deed’ rather than its original meaning of

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<sup>68</sup> Heschel, Abraham Joshua, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984). Although Heschel overstates the case, because space has sacrality in both the Biblical and Rabbinical traditions, he rightly focuses our attention on the transcendent nature of Sabbath practice, transcendent in that it hovers above any particular location.

<sup>69</sup> There were Christians who advocated for a Sabbath rest day and there were and are Sunday trading laws in many different countries, although the English Sunday Trading Act of 1994 allows for most shops to be open for some hours on Sunday. But that is not the general tenor of Christian Sunday observance. For a multivocal theological approach to Christianity and place, see John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), who writes that “Christian history has generally resisted the conception of there being places which are intrinsically holy...” 78. Harold Turner, by way of a contrast, unveiled a ‘theology of space,’ locating holiness in communal gatherings in space, and felt too much attention is paid to time. Harold W. Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), 6.

<sup>70</sup> Yaacov Yadgar, “Religious Practice and Jewish Identity among Israeli Traditionalists – A Post-Secular Perspective” in *Modern Jewish Studies*, Vol 9, Number 3 November 2010, 397ff.

<sup>71</sup> Highlighted by an online rabbinical discussion about wearing a *tallit katan*, or *tzitzit kanafot*, [undershirt with fringes [tzitzit]]. One rabbi was horrified at the thought that a young congregant would choose to do this, another confessed that he has worn one all of his life, a third proffered that we should encourage ritual experimentation, and a fourth shared an article written by a young man from his congregation who had decided that this was a meaningful ritual which he was considering adopting.

‘commandment,’ a convention formerly rarely encountered here as it is a feature of American Yiddish usage.

## 2.4 The Ascendancy of Space over Time

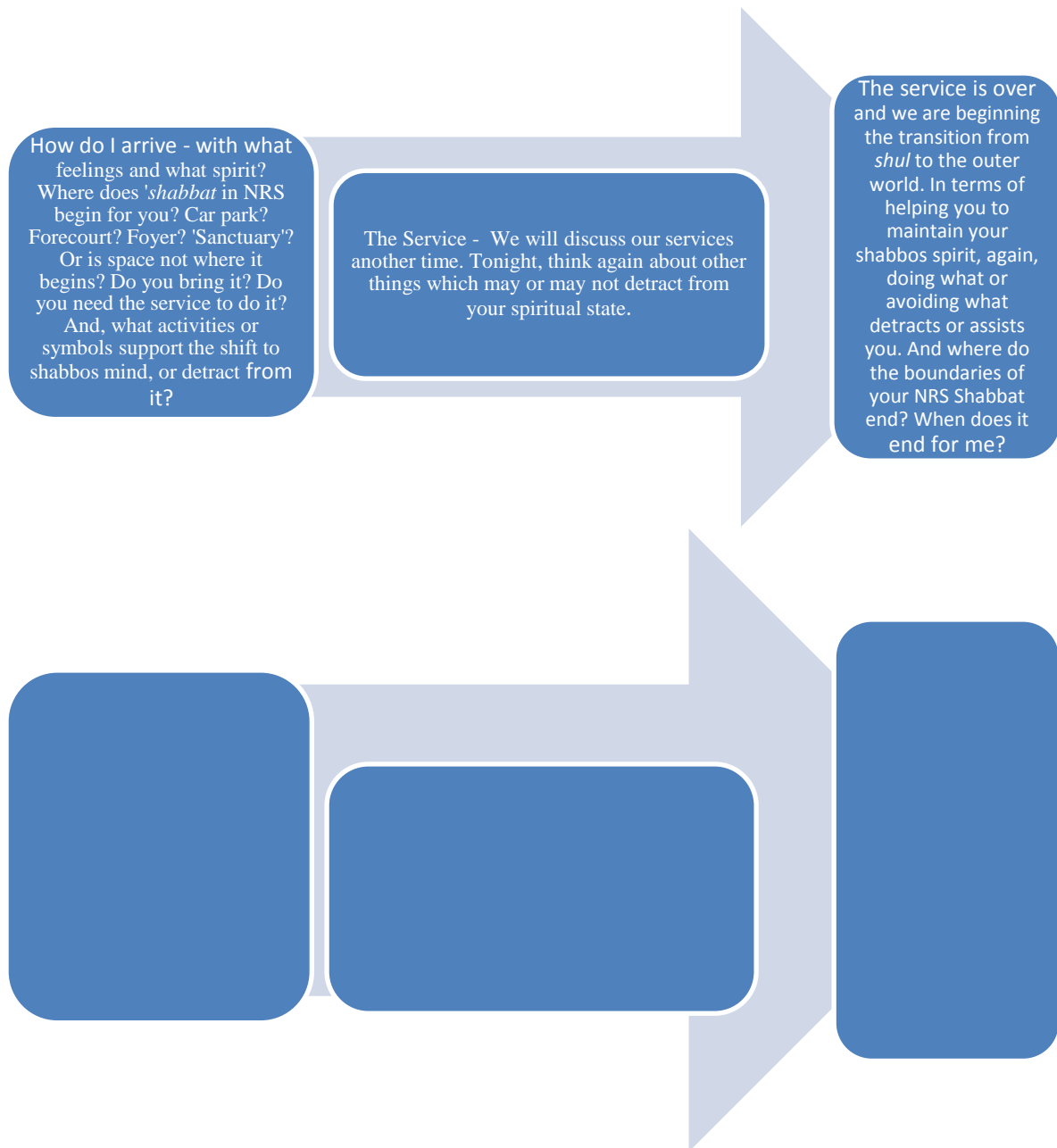
The idea that *Shabbat* is about the “sanctification of time”, in which the quality of *Shabbat* floats over every space a Jew traverses during the twenty five hour period, has shifted towards the sanctification of space, in which *Shabbat* occurs in a discrete space dedicated to it.<sup>72</sup>

In an exercise in which I engaged in my own synagogue, I asked people to describe their passage through the state of non-Shabbat, through to Shabbat mode, determining along the way their passages through liminal states. I gave them the following guide:

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<sup>72</sup>I once invited a *haredi* [ultra-Orthodox] Jew to my home to speak to a group from my synagogue. He explained the intricacies of resting on *Shabbat*, including not driving, at which point my congregants objected, “But that will mean that someone unable to walk cannot attend services.” He replied, “But if they drive to services, they’ll break *Shabbat*.” To which one of my students responded, “But how can they then celebrate *Shabbat*?” And on it went, neither side really understanding the other’s meta-concept. For the one, the Sabbath is a state of being that does not necessarily include attendance at the synagogue, and certainly not if that entails breaking *halachah* [Jewish law], whereas for the others, driving to attend services was the only way they could conceptualize *Shabbat* observance.

## ‘A Palace in Time’



Of the group of six participants, only one indicated that she arrived at the synagogue in ‘*shabbos mode*’, signifying that Sabbath time preceded Sabbath space. For the others, Shabbat more or less began and ended with the service, and much discussion ensued regarding the lighting of candles and eating of challah. I taught that the candles would traditionally be lit at home, functioning as the ritual marker of the onset of the Sabbath, and challah would be eaten just prior to the meal. I had attempted to eliminate these activities, on the basis that we were lighting candles often after Shabbat had begun, and were forced to extinguish them upon leaving, and that we were in like vein making a blessing over the bread,



signifying the incipient Shabbat meal, often after having eaten. I also wished gently to remove these back to the home. However, the significance that I attached to these and the replacement of them as home activities clashed with the symbolic nature accrued to them by the attendees, who were not going to perform these acts at home, and without which the synagogue service felt denuded of Sabbath feel. I was aware that many people attending the course would go to restaurants on the Sabbath, would go shopping, and otherwise engage in activities totally divorced from time-based observances. When not in *shul* on a particular Saturday, Shabbat was essentially annulled. Shabbat observance, therefore, is, for many, bound up with their presence in their synagogue service, does not have any ‘carry through’, and is void, absent, when they as individuals are absent from the service.

The main theatre for the performance of Judaism has come to be primarily confined to the synagogue, Sabbath evening and morning, festivals.<sup>73</sup> The emphasis on spatial sacrality influences the focus of concern, which shifts to the synagogue, its service, its liturgy, and its music. From Hoffman to current S3K literature, it is quite fascinating to note that the arguments for change in religious Jewish life revolve almost solely around alteration of that which takes place *en situ*, in a congregation.

## 2.5 The Attenuation of Worship

One can see from the brief introductory retrospective that poor attendance at services has long been problematic. One could even pose the question, do Jews, non-Orthodox, or even Modern Orthodox, find services meaningful at all? Many proofs to the negative can be brought to bear, and yet, many paradoxes remain. Synagogue affiliation remains relatively high in the UK. Attendance at activities of a synagogue is a different matter. Each of the synagogues I have studied has a sanctuary far too large for their regular *Shabbat* crowd, sufficient for special *Shabbat* gatherings, such as Bar and Bat mitzvah celebrations, and

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<sup>73</sup> This is even the case in the “marginalized” Jewish world of Andhra Pradesh, of which Yulia Egorova states “Like in many Jewish communities around the world, the performance of Jewishness among the Bene Ephraim revolves around the Sabbath service.” Yulia Egorova and Shahid Perwez, *The Jews of Andhra Pradesh: Contesting Caste and Religion in South India*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 68.

completely insufficient for the Days of Awe, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, which retain an allegiance in the hearts and practices of most Jews.<sup>74</sup>

It is in the light of the extended importance of the Sabbath-in-space that Hoffman and Wolfson conceived of S2K. In *The Art of Public Prayer*, Hoffman dissects the components of a synagogue worship event, noting it comprises of some or all of the following: a written text, music, a body of attendees, leaders, and food. He concluded that people will attend if they like the prayers, the music, the food and/or the other people, but as attendances are falling, one can conclude that aspects of the service need altering. His analyses are widely accepted. S2K has been hugely influential in synagogue renewal discussions and subsequent modifications.

## 2.6 Prayer Language: The Words of our Mouths

All progressive Jewish movements have engaged in regular and repeated prayerbook reform.<sup>75</sup> This is more than tangential to the topic of musical change, and does, or rather logically should, represent another plank of the reforming/revitalizing/renewing process.

In 2008, the new MRJ *siddur* structure shifted from what may be described as a potpourri of ‘prayericles’ to an assemblage of the prayers along traditional lines, a realignment with *matbeah hatefilah*, the traditional order of the service, attempting to resolve the problem of low attendance and spiritual meaninglessness through a reversion to a more traditional, even if apocopated, liturgical order.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> FRS and WLS use additional premises; Sinai opens out into the multi-purpose hall, which, on Shabbat, is used for *Kiddush*.

<sup>75</sup> For more on prayerbook reform, see Jakob J. Petuchowski, *Prayerbook Reform in Europe: The Liturgy of European Liberal and Reform Judaism* (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1968) and Eric L. Friedland, *Were Our Mouths Filled with Song: Studies in Liberal Jewish Liturgy* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997).

<sup>76</sup> For more on Jewish liturgy, see Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1993) and A.Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and Its Development* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975).

The emphasis on prayer book reform seems counter-intuitive. As many Jews profess some degree or another of discomfort with the idea of God and belief<sup>77</sup>, and disquiet about a great deal of the prayer language, it seems quite extraordinary that prayer book committees revert to even more traditional features in compiling new *siddurim*.<sup>78</sup> One would have imagined rather that ever more creative types of liturgies would have been the response to diminished interest in prayer, and doubts concerning the theology underlying the prayers.

We will examine below some of the reasons for the more traditional feel to the new *siddur*. This notwithstanding, the language of the prayers and the beliefs that inform them are still evidently troublesome, demonstrated by the Leo Baeck College's RIST [Rabbis In-Service Training] conference of December, 2013, entitled: Disbelief/Misbelief - *Imrei fi v'hegyon libbi*: Do The "Words Of Our Mouths" Match The "Meditations Of Our Hearts"? The publicity stated that "...This day is intended as a mutually-supportive space in which to explore what we believe, opening us to ways in which our liturgies might reflect or express our belief(s)...The process at this seminar... will assist both Movements in the development of prayer and liturgies."<sup>79</sup>

These are the countervailing and contradictory trends: a decrease in belief, commitment, and knowledge about sonic traditions, at the same time as a revival of theologically contested passages, and a shift from a thematic, 'creative' liturgical schemata to a more traditionally designed liturgy. The MRJ itself is increasingly dominated by USA Jewish liturgical music, generally that one might describe as 'pop,' and leaning on research and trends emanating from this world.

Although at present, the fulcrum of hope and promise for liturgical renaissance is with musical change, perhaps a further stage will see a more dramatic alteration in the nature of

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<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Steven M. Cohen and Keith Kahn-Harris, *Beyond Belonging: The Jewish Identities of Moderately Engaged British Jews: Highlights of the UJIA Study of Jewish Identity* (London: Design and Promotions Ltd. 2004)34 - 35

<sup>78</sup> LJ and the URJ also recently published new, rather more traditionally-constructed, *siddurim*.

<sup>79</sup> [http://www.lbc.ac.uk/images/stories/Courses/rist/rist\\_brochure\\_website.pdf](http://www.lbc.ac.uk/images/stories/Courses/rist/rist_brochure_website.pdf)

the prayers themselves. As Cantor William Sharlin notes, "...underlying our groping for a new and meaningful musical idiom is the struggle to discover a new concept of worship itself."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Cantor William Sharlin, "A Symphony of a Cantorial Life: The Notes and Reflections of Cantor William Sharling" in *Jewish Sacred Music & Jewish Identity: Continuity and Fragmentation*, ed. Jonathan L. Friedmann and Brad Stetson (St Paul: Paragon House, 2008), 92.

# CHAPTER THREE - A MUSICAL HISTORY OF THE UK REFORM WORLD

## 3.1 The Inception of this Chapter

This chapter attempts to uncover the earliest musical history and sources of both the first Reform synagogue, and the subsequent affiliates, of the Reform synagogues in the UK. In so doing, I intend to trace the trajectory of the music, attest to its ubiquity, and lay the foundations for the heritage of music now being superseded by attempts to create a new musical convention.

When I began this research, I intended to compile a brief summary of the musical heritage of the movement, but, as I engaged in research, I realized that this could provide a unique contribution to Anglo-Jewish history, and thus, this section grew to become a more substantial aspect of the thesis.

Music in the Reform synagogues tends to be mentioned as a footnote to other discussions or merits a few sentences along the way, and historical documents pertaining to music have either been lost, been thrown away, or are languishing somewhere in unknown cupboards and vaults. I collected some of these documents as I passed through the various synagogues, and deposited them with the Movement's other official papers in the University of Southampton Special Collections archive.

The neglectful treatment of the physical documents themselves exists in an ironic contradictory relationship to the hallowed deference given to the myth of the musical heritage of the movement. "My own generation has been a careless, at times even destructive, guardian of its heritage of music."<sup>81</sup> The music files and books stem from an earlier era, and are often rudimentary by our standards, collected in softback format, or in old loose-leaf folders, hand-written, copied on bandas [spirit duplicators]. The sheets on which this music was printed is, in many of the synagogues I consulted, locked away in a closet or in a back

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<sup>81</sup> Eisenstein, Judith Kaplan, *Heritage of Music: The Music of the Jewish People* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1973), 3.

room, very often uncatalogued and unorganized. But the power that the earlier music wields in the movement is palpable, being the lodestar against which all ‘new’ musical endeavours are judged. There are many within the constituent synagogues of the movement, and not just the elders, who still venerate their ‘old’ music, revered as ‘traditional’<sup>82</sup>, and are reticent to incorporate ‘new’ music into their repertoire. I will return to this theme again in the following chapters of the thesis. But for now, it is important to note that, despite the negligence concerning the sources of the music, both the tangible resource and the provenance of the melodies, the melodies themselves have become ‘traditional’ and it proves extremely difficult to place them in a back room or lock them away in a closet.

The other reason that this chapter came to be occupy a greater role stems from the fact that the people who sang the music and whose memories of how and why it came into the movement, are aging. Their reminiscences have also been neglected, forgotten, and once they are all gone, an important aspect of our Jewish history and heritage will disappear as well. Already I have been told that I am twenty years too late; in some places, one is reliant on the memories of people in their eighties and nineties, and in others, there is no one around who remembers. But for some, helping me with my thesis has brought back wonderful memories and, I hope, some joy in knowing that there will be a record of this aspect of their lives, which gave them so much pleasure. Music is of utmost importance to those who come to synagogue, and again, it is curious that so little has been chronicled about this. I cannot explain this neglect; everyone with whom I have spoken thought it a wonderful project.

### **3.2 Introduction to Reform Judaism In Great Britain**

The history of Reform Judaism in the UK has its own arc of development. Whilst it was true that “...the toleration it [England] extended to Jews was more generous than in most countries...,” nonetheless, it is clear from documents of both the Western Synagogue and Bevis Marks Synagogue that there were similar pressures as on the Continent toward assimilation, intermarriage, and conversion, and shame at how services appeared to the

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<sup>82</sup> Various meanings attached to the idea of ‘traditional’ will emerge in the ethnography.

outside, Christian, world, as British society “...was... hostile or indifferent to cultural diversity. It did not respect or value the customs and beliefs of the Jewish religion...”<sup>83</sup>



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<sup>83</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain*, 5 – 6.

### 3.3 The Founding of the West London Synagogue Of British Jews

West London Synagogue [hereafter WLS] was the first of the Reform synagogues in the UK, established by nineteen Sephardi and five Ashkenazi men in 1840 by as a break-away from the Spanish-Portuguese Bevis Marks Synagogue. The founders wrote a Declaration which was presented at a meeting held on 15 April, 1840, in which they outlined their concerns: “We, the Undersigned, regarding Public Worship as highly conducive to the interests of religion, consider it a matter of deep regret that it is not more frequently attended...we ascribe it to the distance of the existing Synagogues from the places of our residence...”

Although UK Reform histories usually begin with the demographic argument – the need for a synagogue in the West End of London for those who had moved from the East End and City – and the desire to unify Sephardi and Ashkenazi under the rubric “British,” the April, 1840 declaration continues: “...the length and “unimpressive manner” of performance, and dearth of religious instruction” were other crucial factors that led them to found a synagogue in the West End with different times for services, conducted “...in a manner more calculated to inspire feelings of devotion.”<sup>84</sup> The new synagogue held its first services in April, 1840, and in January, 1842, the congregation was officially incorporated.

There were, therefore, many factors which led ultimately to the foundation of Reform Judaism in England. Although the Anglo-Reform movement likes to maintain the myth of autochthonous Reform with its distinctive ontology, as in this excerpt from the MRJ website: “...Reform Judaism in Britain started for entirely different reasons,”<sup>85</sup> we know that there was contact between reform-minded individuals in England and on the Continent. Although more conservative than in Germany, its progress was followed, and comments in German and French Jewish journals indicated that this new synagogue was not simply a matter of convenient location and that musical alteration figured prominently: “We hope this would educate Jews sufficiently to explain themselves to Christians”, or this from a French journal,

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<sup>84</sup> Anne J. Kershen and Jonathan A. Romain, *Tradition and Change: A History of Reform Judaism in Britain 1840 – 1995* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1995), 26.

<sup>85</sup> Movement for Reform Judaism, Web site, <http://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/about-us/what-is-the-history-of-reform-judaism.html>.



noting the reforms that were similar to those being made in Germany: "they want to shorten the service by omitting certain prayers, by replacing ancient chants with other melodies..."<sup>86</sup>

### 3.4 West London Synagogue Forms of Prayer

The newly-formed synagogue engaged their first minister, Reverend Professor David Woolf Marks, a noted Hebrew scholar. In 1841, he published a prayer book, *Forms of Prayer*, subsequently to become the *siddur* for the burgeoning Reform movement. The introduction betrays a strong predilection for the hegemony of words in prayer, but does make mention of musical manners of presenting the prayers: "Here [in the holy books] they found...hymns for the utterance of every feeling of gratitude and reverence with which the heart of man can elevate itself towards the Great Creator" and "...the praise of the Deity has been chanted...."<sup>87</sup>

The introduction reveals much about the congregation for whom it was intended. For one thing, it contains a concise but erudite examination of theories about the historical origins and compositions of the prayers, and mentions the names of various prayers in unpointed [without vowels] Hebrew. It then makes mention of the blending of so-called German and Portuguese traditions under the rubric of British Jewry. And it serves as an apologia for liturgical reform.

One point is worth mentioning, a leitmotif of the reasons for the various liturgical and musical experiments of non-Orthodox Judaism, and that is, that the prayerbooks are reformed because of a perception that altering the liturgy will re-awaken spiritual feeling and devotion. To wit, "...we have arrived at the conviction that the house of prayer does not exercise that salutary influence over the minds and hearts of the congregants which it is intended and capable to exert...and it must be universally admitted that the present mode of worship fails to call forth the devotion, so essential to the religious improvement of the people."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Cassell, *History*. 19

<sup>87</sup> The Ministers of the Congregation, eds. *Forms of Prayer Used in the West London Synagogue of British Jews: Volume 1 – Daily and Sabbath Prayers* (London: Wertheimer, Lea and Co., 1898), x.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

This is paralleled in the introduction to the volume of Sephardi melodies mentioned above: “...the earnest wish to prevent, in the present age of religious indifference, the total decay and oblivion of those sacred hymns and melodies...”<sup>89</sup> Here, although the one motivation for the book was to preserve melodies under threat of being lost due to neglect, the other was, as quoted earlier...”to assist...public and private devotion.”<sup>90</sup> We note that, early on, synagogues and rabbis struggle with lack of attendance, and believed that music was one way of revivifying the community’s prayer. Now it is believed that new music will do this; Verrinder and De Sola believed that the answer lay in the ancient melodies.

The *siddur* is, in essence, an abbreviated traditional *siddur*. There were six editions, the last being in 1930, at which point a preface was added that noted that some things were expunged and some things added back or newly created. I did find on one page a direction to add a hymn at that place,<sup>91</sup> otherwise, there is little to indicate what was sung and what was not. By way of contrast, the American Reform prayer book, the *Union Prayer Book*,<sup>92</sup> is laid out with instructions indicating when the Reader is to lead, when the congregation is to read, and what the choir is to sing. This greater emphasis on music in the service indicates that in the American Reform movement that music played a central role in the service. For the British Reform movement, this was not made manifest.

### 3.5. Choir, Organ, and Songbooks

Although there has been research into the musical heritage of WLS, little is known about the very first music it used. Early on WLS established the choral tradition for which it is still

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<sup>89</sup> Emanuel Aguilar and Reverend David Aaron de Sola, *The Ancient Melodies of the Liturgy of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews*. (London: Wessel and Co; Schott and Co, 1857), 1.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> *Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship*, Sixth Edition, 1931, 24. (Hymn) is written in the middle of the page

<sup>92</sup> Isaac Mayer Wise (ed.), *Tefilot Yisrael : Union Prayer Book : as adopted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis*. Published by the Ritual Committee, Chicago, Ill 1892; Kaufmann Kohler (ed.), revised 1895; further revised 1918 and 1940.

known, at first, an all-male choir, and later a mixed -voice choir.<sup>93</sup> The organ was installed in 1859.<sup>94</sup> That music was important in the culture of WLS is evident by the appointment of Charles Garland Verrinder (1839 –1904) a renowned Christian organist as the accompanist.<sup>95</sup>

Although the synagogue had advertised for a suitable Jewish performer in the *Jewish Chronicle*,<sup>96</sup> the organ was not an instrument Jews often played.<sup>97</sup> Verrinder was later retained permanently, and joined Edward Hart, who was the choir director. In 1863, having decided that Hart was “utterly inefficient,”<sup>98</sup> his services were terminated, and Verrinder took on the whole of the musical direction of the synagogue: choir, music, and organ.

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<sup>93</sup> Verrinder mentions his reasons for including female voices in a note to the WLS leadership in 1863. He wrote that some boys voices “...have become totally useless... therefore, we need to look for other means in order to guard against the entire breakdown of the choir within a very short period.” He and the choirmaster went to the Westminster Jews’ Day School, found girls “nearly all with very fair voices and possessing a slight knowledge of music.” They were to be remunerated and to receive instruction. This will “Add to the solemnity of our Divine Services.” Women were already singing in some church choirs, but the issue in Jewish tradition revolves around ‘*kol isha*’ that is, the proscription against women’s voices being raised in song in the presence of men, as the female voice can ‘titillate’ and therefore distract men from prayer [Berachot 24a]. Other notes regarding women in the choir were concerned with preserving their modesty, leading to a “be heard but not seen” choral placement. For more on women and singing, see issue devoted to the topic in *Journal of Synagogue Music*, Volume 32, Fall 2007.

<sup>94</sup> The archival material contains many documents pertaining to the organ, including, in 1867, correspondence between Verrinder and the leadership concerning the amount of space that should be devoted to the organ.

<sup>95</sup> Verrinder worked for WLS from 1859 – 1904. For more on Verrinder, see Susan Wollenberg, “Charles Garland Verrinder and Music at the West London Synagogue, 1859–1904,” in *Music and Performance Culture in Nineteenth- Century Britain: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Temperley*, ed. Bennett Zon (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 59.

<sup>96</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 Feb 1867.

<sup>97</sup> For an exploration of the place of the organ in Jewish worship, see Tina Frühauf, *The Organ and Its Music in German-Jewish Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)..

<sup>98</sup> AJ 59/1/3 MS140

Charles Kensington Salaman (1814 – 1901), an eminent Anglo-Jewish composer and musician<sup>99</sup> and an active member of the Music Committee at WLS, collaborated with Verrinder between 1861 and 1892, on six volumes of music, to which he also contributed compositions.

As this study is primarily of the music for the Sabbath services, we will concentrate on the first two volumes of the series entitled *The Music used in the Services of the West London Synagogue of British Jews, principally composed and collected, and adapted by Charles Salaman. The Ancient Melodies harmonised and the whole Arranged with obbligate Organ Accompaniment, and edited by C. G. Verrinder*.<sup>100</sup> These two volumes also contain music for pieces which would be sung on *Shabbat* during the intermediary days of the *Shalosh Regalim* [the Pilgrim Festivals]. Aside from the self-explanatory title page above, no other clues are given as to motivation or purpose in creating these volumes or for liturgical music in general. All one can reasonably deduce is that the older music they were going to use needed to be adapted for the WLS style.

Why did Verrinder, and West London Synagogue, wish to deploy organ music? For one, Verrinder was himself a church organist whose Doctorate in Music was granted by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1873. For another, WLS was founded by wealthy members of the Jewish community. The congregation may have conceived of themselves in cathedral-like terms, the synagogue into which they moved in 1870, a majestic neo-Byzantium edifice, with a lofty dome which seems to be hallowing the space beneath it, and a raised front-facing *bimah/almemar* [raised platform or dais for the clergy] soaring above the congregation. It did not replicate the traditional layout of Bevis Marks, nor of the Great Western Synagogue, also resplendent buildings, with the leaders of prayers embedded within the praying congregation, however, WLS did arrange seats such that some faced each other, thus retaining a Jewish flavour in the design. Replete with a splendid pipe organ, and a concealed choir, one could deduce that the design for the whole resembled the Cathedrals and grand churches of

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<sup>99</sup> For background on Salaman's musical reputation, see his obituary in *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, August 1, 1901, vol.42, no. 702, 530- 533.

<sup>100</sup> See appendix one for the contents.

Anglicanism<sup>101</sup> and that this cultural norm would have appealed to the Victorian Jewish gentleman of the day. Organs were, as well, employed in German, and later in North American, synagogues – and there were those who railed against them on the basis of *chukkat goyim* [imitation of non-Jewish practises].

### 3.6 The Music of Bevis Marks at WLS

What relationship did the music of WLS bear to the music of its parent synagogue, Bevis Marks?<sup>102</sup> Chazan Eliot Alderman, the current Musical Director of Bevis Marks Synagogue, and himself researching the early music of his synagogue, wrote that, “Unfortunately, my congregation has kept poor records of its own history, never mind that of other synagogues, and in fact, I have tried to contact people at WLS a couple of times to see if they can shed any light on the Spanish-Portuguese musical history itself!”<sup>103</sup>

Alderman and I went through Verrinder’s music books together to search for its Spanish and Portuguese origins. One possible indicator of the Sephardi origin of the music lies in the transliteration – the *ṣ* is transcribed as ‘*ng*’, which is generally only used in transliteration in Spanish-Portuguese settings; however, Dr Alexander Knapp<sup>104</sup> has found this transliteration in a volume of the music of Julius Lazarus Mombach (1813 – 1880).<sup>105</sup> This music was for

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<sup>101</sup> See Temperley, Nicholas, *The Music of the English Parish Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), Vol. 1, for a comprehensive account of the place of music in English church life.

<sup>102</sup> In an interesting twist, Bevis Marks has ‘borrowed’ back music from WLS. Elliot Alderman wrote that: “They [melodies from Bevis Marks] were definitely not sung in harmony by the Spanish & Portuguese choir of the time, because our...arrangements... are... adaptations of Verrinder’s using the original form of the melody.” They sing Verrinder melodies for *Hashivenu* and *Eyn Keloheinu*, and *Adon Olam* melodies by Salaman and Waley, a member of WLS.

<sup>103</sup> Private correspondence with Eliot Alderman.

<sup>104</sup> Alexander Knapp, “The influence of German music on United Kingdom synagogue practice.” *Jewish Historical Studies, Volume 35* (1996 – 98), 181. .

<sup>105</sup> Mombach came to the UK from Germany as a *meshorer*, then worked as the *chazan* for the Great Synagogue. He composed, “influenced by the ‘new wave’ of synagogue composition coming from Sulzer in Vienna, Lewandowski in Berlin and Naumbourg in

use by the choir members who, perhaps due to poor Hebrew skills or stemming from an Ashkenazi background, would have needed a transliteration, and were being instructed in the Spanish-Portuguese manner of pronouncing ץ.

There is, surprisingly, not as much Spanish-Portuguese music as one might have expected to find. From where and in what form the music came to Verrinder is also rather a mystery. One of the earliest volumes of music published was the 1857 volume *The Ancient Melodies of the Liturgy of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews*, by Emanuel Aguilar and Reverend David Aaron de Sola, *chazan* of Bevis Marks Synagogue from 1815 – 1860<sup>106</sup>. Alderman is himself not certain whether Verrinder learned his melodies from the Aguilar/De Sola book, or from aural transmission. A third complicating factor is the Sephardi music published in the standard compilation of music used in the United Synagogues,<sup>107</sup> the *Voice of Prayer and Praise* [‘The Blue Book’], a collection of music used in Orthodox synagogues;<sup>108</sup> it is uncertain whether Verrinder used The Blue Book as his source, or whether they took their music from him.<sup>109</sup> Alderman notes that there are three important melodies which serve various purposes in the Sephardic tradition, and that Verrinder omitted to use one of these.<sup>110</sup>

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Paris...” Victor Tunkel, “The Anglo-Jewish Cantorate,” (European Cantors Association, December 2004) <http://www.cantors.eu/Articles.html#Anglo>. He went on to teach *chazanut* at the Orthodox Jews’ College. “Nearly all the music in use in the German synagogues of England and the English colonies was composed by him.” *Jewish Encyclopedia*, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10938-mombach-julius-lazarus>.

<sup>106</sup> De Sola writes, “...the present work...as far as we are cognisant, is the first ever published on the subject of the Sephardic liturgy.” De Sola, *The Ancient Melodies*, 1.

<sup>107</sup> Centrist Orthodox movement in the UK, whose head is known as the Chief Rabbi. US synagogues have the largest number of affiliated people. In 1870, it constituted of 16 synagogues. See Kershen and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 52.

<sup>108</sup> Francis L. Cohen & David M. Davis, *The Voice of Prayer and Praise: A Handbook of Synagogue Music of Congregational Singing*. (London: Office of the United Synagogue). The ‘Blue Book’ has been published in different editions over a number of years and is still a standard British liturgical resource. For more, see Charles Heller, “Masters of the London Blue Book” *Journal of Synagogue Music*, Fall 2006, Volume 31 No.1, 67.

<sup>109</sup> His setting on Psalm 121 is included in the 1933 edition, 331.

<sup>110</sup> *Shirat Hayam* and *Yigdal*; the one not used is *Allel d'Italia*.

### 3.6.1 Westernizing Jewish Liturgical Music

What Sephardic music is used was altered in a number of different ways. According to Professor Mark Kligman, by the mid-nineteenth century, Western Sephardi music was already undergoing a process of alteration<sup>111</sup> and this can be noted in the aforementioned Aguilar/De Sola book, where the melodies are set in the established Western style, with time and key signatures, and four-part harmonies, instrumental accompaniment being proscribed as noted above.

This process parallels that of the Ashkenazi world and was in keeping with contemporary trends in synagogue music in Europe – in this era, in general, there was a desire to retain a link to the tradition of *nusach*, or modal chant, but to re-shape and tame it through meter and rhythm and harmony. One hears in the compositions of Lewandowski<sup>112</sup> that he has adapted the liturgical modes and re-cast them in metrical and harmonic frameworks familiar and comfortable for a Western, modernizing, congregation. On the other hand, there were still passages chanted by the *chazan*, in both the Ashkenazi and Sephardi worlds, which were retained untrammelled and unwesternized, as they were not intended for communal singing, a corpus of melodicals that were presented in their original, recitative-style, format. This became a contested issue, as various reformers attempted to delete *chazanut* [cantorate] altogether;<sup>113</sup> they were not entirely able to do so in Europe or later, in America; perhaps their greatest success was in the UK!

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<sup>111</sup>Mark Kligman, “*Introduction to Sephardi and Mizrahi Liturgical Music*” <http://huc.edu/sephardic/media/Intro.pdf>, 24.

<sup>112</sup> Lewandowski was a *meshorer*, boy soprano, who accompanied a *chazan*. He studied Western music and composition at the Berlin Academy. For more on Lewandowski see, Joseph A. Levine, *Synagogue Song in America* (Crown Point, Indiana: White Cliffs Media Company, 1989); Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development*; Zoe Jacobs, *Salomon Sulzer and Louis Lewandowski*, in *Great Reform Lives*, ed. Jonathan Romain (London: The Movement for Reform Judaism, 2010). 33 – 40;

<sup>113</sup> For more on this, see Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*, chapter XII.

Within the ‘eastern’ worlds of Ashkenaz, and the Eastern Sephardi lands, the taste in music remained quite ‘traditional’, in that it retained its melismatic, improvisatory, expressive quality, and its unfamiliar ‘clashing’ harmonies in semi-tones and open chords. This music had no place at WLS. Reforming/assimilating/aculturating Jews, entering the universities, workplaces, public arenas, and private spaces of the wider society, mingling with non-Jews and attending cultural entertainments such as opera and attending cultural entertainments such as opera and concerts, reformed/assimilated/aculturated their liturgical music to conform to both internal and external subjectivities about decorum and solemnity, and what constituted a proper, English, ‘act of divine worship.’ Later generations may have evinced an appreciation for the ‘exotic;’ within this Victorian philosophical *weltanschauung*, there was a definite hierarchy of the ‘primitive’ and ‘advanced,’ and the founders of WLS knew they wanted to be regarded as exemplars of civilization.

### 3.7 Verrinder’s Contribution

Verrinder inherited an already altered ‘Oriental’ music upon which he applied arrangements and the additional of lush organ accompaniments, developments permissible in a non-Orthodox setting. Sometimes his endeavours led to unfamiliar syllabic stresses, to melodies used for different purposes than they were intended,<sup>114</sup> and to musical passages simplified for the choir in ways that deviated from accepted Spanish-Portuguese practice. In *The Ancient Melodies of the Liturgy of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews*, the compilers normally included the first and last verses only, so Verrinder would have needed to fill in the middle portions in order to give his predominantly non-Jewish choristers a full copy and himself a written accompaniment, all of which was unnecessary in a traditionally observant congregation with a *chazan* and Jewish choir singing *a capella*.

In addition to the Sephardi heritage, there was also some influence from the Ashkenazi tradition, as the books included music by Naumbourg<sup>115</sup> and Sulzer, from France and Germany. We also know that on occasion, Verrinder included music from Mombach.

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<sup>114</sup> For example, festival melodies or *nusach* used on *Shabbat*

<sup>115</sup> 1815 – 1880. He was another of those trained in classical *chazanut* and Western music; German born, he achieved great fame in Paris. For more information see Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*, 261ff.



But we also know that music was imported from the non-Jewish world and that this was both contentious and appreciated. In one letter to the wardens, Verrinder wrote “I am proud to say several Cathedral organists as well as other professional and amateur musicians do not fail to express to me their admiration of the musical arrangements.”<sup>116</sup> More interesting is an 1867 correspondence between Salaman and the wardens, concerning some of his own musical output being used in Christian services, perhaps even adapted by him. It is curious, given the fact that, as Salaman points out, Verrinder used and adapted Christian and secular music:

I presume the wardens have the right of withdrawing the compositions from being used in the service of the synagogue; whether it would be wise to do so is another question. To be consistent they must abolish nearly all the Christian Chants so admirably adapted to the Hebrew Psalms by our talented organist. They must also withdraw from performance some of my adaptations of Mendelssohn’s Elijah...likewise... the performance of one of our more beautiful “*Yigdals*”, the theme of which has been taken by Costa as a leading subject in his “*Eli*”<sup>117</sup> and which he has treated as a fugue in his Overture. They must also prohibit the organ voluntaries, so judiciously and admirably introduced and performed by Verrinder, in consequence of their association with Exeter and St James’s balls [!] and occasionally with secular music. Wardens and the junior members are not aware that some of our more ancient and beautiful Hebrew melodies have been adapted to the poetry of Lord Byron, or rather, that he has written poetry expressly for them...<sup>118</sup>these melodies are sung on more solemn occasions in the older synagogues and ...are not the less prized by Jews in consequence...<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> 8 Dec 1870

<sup>117</sup> Michael Costa, who composed *Eli*, an oratorio, in 1855.

<sup>118</sup> A Jewish composer named Isaac Nathan requested that Lord Byron write words to melodies Nathan had composed, melodies purportedly based on music from the Sephardi world. They have long been out of print, but two scholars at San Jose State University, Paul Douglass and Frederick Burwick, have revived them and they have been recorded online. One can listen here: <http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/douglass/music/album-hebrew.html>

<sup>119</sup> Feb 1867, AJ 59/1/320.

What is striking about the second passage is the incongruous manner in which the absorption of melodies is permitted. Contrefacta from the Christian world drawn into the Jewish orbit, even if unadulteratedly Christian in background and functional use, makes the music ‘kosher’, but music from the Jewish sphere which then passes into the Christian world negates its Jewishness. Salaman was right to highlight the inconsistency of the argument, and deftly hints at the way music, whether liturgical or otherwise, drifts between religions, and the concert stage, quite freely. It is a pity he did not consider the topic in more details, but it is amusing to think that music was in the vanguard of interfaith dialogue.

### 3.7.1 The Place of Music at WLS

It is important to note that the books are not prefaced in any manner, in stark contrast to the lengthy and scholarly introduction to the earlier work *Ancient Melodies of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews*. In this work, De Sola states that even the reflection upon and study of music is important, as it...”may contribute to the furtherance of devotion...and tend to improve the public or private worship of *all* our brethren Israelites...”<sup>120</sup> De Sola offers a reflection upon the function of music in a religious service: “...[these melodies] have proven efficient aids in elevating and sustaining the public and individual worship of Him who is “enthroned amidst the praises of Israel”...those sacred hymns and melodies which delighted and edified our ancestors through many generations, and which...assist...public and private devotion...”<sup>121</sup> With this, he concludes that compiling such a book will aid the prayer life of Jews and the Jewish community. I have found no such statements from Verrinder. De Sola further supplies us with an archaeology of the poets, melodies, and histories behind the music in the collection. Verrinder, by contrast, only infers that the manuals he has edited serve to preserve the ‘ancient melodies.’

The first minister of WLS, Reverend D.W. Marks, does comment, albeit briefly, on the role of music in prayer. In a sermon given on the day the organ was first used, 20 September, 1859, he wrote, “...no one can attentively read the Biblical records of that age without noting the idea taking root, that music tends to kindle the imagination, to warm the heart, and to

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<sup>120</sup> De Sola, *The Ancient Melodies*, ii.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, 1.

awaken the liveliest sentiments of piety.”<sup>122</sup> Nonetheless, more attention was to be paid to the organ and historical arguments for its revivification, than to the purpose of music in a service, and the nature of the music itself.

### 3.7.2 Verrinder’s Musical Influences

It is clear then that the earliest music of this first synagogue derived in the main from Jewish composers but that the arrangements were almost exclusively in the hands of the non-Jewish organist, Charles Verrinder, who, as time passed, composed more and more musical settings himself. This ironically establishes the importance of music to the early reformers, in that it was significantly entrusted to a well-regarded professional musician, who would create a musical heritage of high quality, but whose background in church music would ensure that the WLS music would resemble in style that of the Anglican Church.<sup>123</sup> Some of this type of influence would have been tempered by the Jewish Charles Salaman, but increasingly, Verrinder was the main source of music emanating from WLS.

That he made a study of the music and became ‘expert’ in it he attests to a memo, in which he mentions his “perfect acquaintance with all the music of the synagogue...”<sup>124</sup> But there are few hints as to the nature of his knowledge, how he acquired it, whether or not it was already mediated through the Christian liturgical musical training, or whether he made a study of traditional synagogue music by visiting other synagogues.

Whatever he meant by the comment, this contrasts starkly with the grand composers of the German nineteenth century. “Ashkenazic liturgists...developing a different form of musical “reformation” by working within the age-old religious traditions...to preserve, enhance, and

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<sup>122</sup> Marks, *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions*: 169

<sup>123</sup> Some of the debate concerning non-Jewish organists is sketched in Frühauf, *The Organ*, 89ff.

<sup>124</sup> 29 January, 1866

renew. Historic synagogue music was to be viewed as sacred and inherent to Jewish spiritual expression.”<sup>125</sup>

One piece of mysterious information surrounds assertions that Verrinder learned Hebrew for his work at WLS, attested to by the Jewish Chronicle in his obituary,<sup>126</sup> and although I did not find evidence of this in the archives to date, further research may uncover a note to that effect.

### 3.7.3 Congregation Reception

Verrinder’s music was, generally, well received. When he wrote to the Council for permission and funding to publish the second volume of his music, Simon Waley,<sup>127</sup> asked to proffer an opinion about the manuscript wrote,

Most of it consists of music that is now frequently sung in Synagogue. There is very little that I do not know, and very little that does not seem quite appropriate. The whole of it seems prepared in a spirit thoroughly appreciating the services for which it is intended. The character of the music is elevated, and devotional...and composed in a thoroughly... musician-like style... Nearly all the music seems adapted to our service, although there might naturally be differences of opinion as to many of the individual pieces...<sup>128</sup>

Even the Jewish Chronicle of Verrinder’s time waxed enthusiastic. Concerning the WLS Jubilee Service, the reporter stated that “...we can unreservedly compliment Dr Verrinder... upon his special compositions, [and] his choice of older melodies...” It was noted that they

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<sup>125</sup> Irene Heskes, *Passport to Jewish Music: Its History, Traditions, and Culture* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 188. Here she also discusses the important influence of Sulzer, Lewandowski and Naumbourg. See also Eric Werner, *A Voice Still Heard...The Sacred Songs of the Ashkenazic Jews* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976). See chapters 12 and 13, for more on Sulzer and Lewandowski.

<sup>126</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 July 1904: 25

<sup>127</sup> A warden at WLS and himself a composer of Jewish and other music.

<sup>128</sup> Aug 8, 1870 – from SW Waley, To Jacob Elkin, Secretary of WLS.

could “trace everywhere a...musician experienced in the traditions of English church music.”<sup>129</sup>

### 3.7.4 Performance

One thing to note: Many of Verrinder’s letters revolve around money, and perhaps the possibility that he needed to struggle for appropriate recompense somewhat diminishes the idea that music was important to the synagogue. And yet, he remained at WLS for the whole of his career and is reported to have said that the years at the synagogue were the happiest of his life.<sup>130</sup>

The archive contains many interesting titbits concerning the choir. Is a choir an *accoutrement* or functionally a corpus of *shlikhei tzibur*? The question is posed because the choir was composed of both paid and unpaid, volunteer, members, some of whom at least may not have regarded themselves as engaged in the *mitzvah* [commandment] of leading the congregation in prayer. In one representative letter, a chorister asked for leave to be absent to perform at another concert [sic] whilst another described herself as an ‘artiste.’<sup>131</sup> The impression is given that at least some of the choir saw their work as a job, a ‘gig’ if you will, rather than as undertaking a serious spiritual role in the worship. It was, however, a difficult choir to join, with auditions judged by Verrinder and others from the synagogue.

### 3.7.5 Decision-Making

The ability to finalize the music was not Verrinder’s alone. As we have seen, there are several references to the need to solicit approval from the wardens for many aspects of the synagogue’s music, and as well from the Music Committee. In addition, Verrinder does mention on one letter that he also solicited opinions on pieces from members of the

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<sup>129</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, “Jubilee of the Reform Congregation,” 29 January 1892, supplement: 22.

<sup>130</sup> Philippa Bernard, *A Beacon of Light*. (London: West London Synagogue, 2013), 80 – 81.

<sup>131</sup> November 28, 1864.

congregation.<sup>132</sup> He also mentions that he is sensitive to the feelings of others, but does bow to the power of the Wardens, as in this note where he responds to some complaints about a new setting of *Az Yashir*: “I did not more than carry out suggestions made to me by at least two of your number. And I thought you gave permission to a feeling which I heard was pretty general outside the Warden’s committee room but is now condemned without being heard. No “changes in the Synagogue music have been introduced... the latest additions, from Naumbourg, were made at the special request of Mr Elkin who supplied me with the books from which to make adaptations.”<sup>133</sup>

As one can intuit, this defused decision-making process was fraught with some tension and not even Charles Salaman was immune. At one point, there was an exchange between Salaman and the Wardens, concerning “...the publication of some of my vocal compositions and in the name of the wardens you request from me ‘some explanation’” which he does not deem necessary; nor does he accede to the rights of the wardens demanding any such explanations.<sup>134</sup> Salaman defends himself with greater force than Verrinder; this may be that Verrinder, however beloved he was, remained an outsider within the congregation.

### 3.7.6 Music is a Thing of Beauty

There is a lack of thoughtful reflection upon music and religious and spiritual matters which echoes a statement by Endelman concerning 18th century Anglo-Jewish life when he wrote, “...it is important to remember that London was on the cultural periphery of the Jewish world in the eighteenth century. It was a raw, rowdy, untamed place without well-established traditions of scholarship and piety.”<sup>135</sup> WLS emerged out of this ‘raw rowdiness’ into the Victorian period with “...levels of observance and piety which were markedly lower...”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Letter July 10, 1862. AJ175 131/15.

<sup>133</sup> Sept 12 1876. AJ59/3/4.

<sup>134</sup> 12 Feb 1867. MS 140 AJ59/1/2.

<sup>135</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain*, 62.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

than in Central Europe;<sup>137</sup> thus they introduced reforms that were “moderate measures that responded to social rather than political needs.”<sup>138</sup> With such narrow desires, the Jews of WLS engaged a prominent non-Jewish organist to create services that would “...conform more closely to middle-class notions of decorum and gentility.”<sup>139</sup> Further reflection upon music and worship was not forthcoming – their preoccupations revolved around ‘beauty,’ which will become a recurrent theme in the musical language of WLS.

WLS maintained a level of interactive tension, with non-Jewish organists and Jewish musical directors, some of whom had a background in Orthodoxy, where they would have acquired other musical leanings. But the power of the corpus established in greatest measure by Verrinder, and the centrality of the organ, impressed itself fervently on the congregation and upon the Directors of Music who would otherwise have known differently, as we shall see. And thus, the music that was disseminated throughout the movement was a music designed to accompany rational worship services led frontally by rabbi and choir, non – participatory, and unembodied – how much the more so could a choir set aloft illustrate this value? In a correspondence engaged in 1857, there is an allusion to demands by Verrinder for a huge space for a grand organ, leaving the impression that the choir was more important than the ministers.<sup>140</sup>

WLS engaged professional musicians, often well-regarded in the wider society, to ensure an excellent performance; certainly they were in a financial position to be able to do this, nonetheless, the impression remains that the quality of the music was paramount and other considerations, such as a connection to the traditions of music in the synagogue, were corresponding unimportant.

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<sup>137</sup> Perhaps reflecting the fact that “...Jews who lived in England were comparatively fortunate...their disabilities were not as extensive as those which afflicted Jewish elsewhere in Europe...;” Jewish learning and observance being less valorised than being “Englishmen.” David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>138</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain*, 112.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>140</sup> 26 sept, 1867. AJ59/1/2.

There is one last intriguing piece of information. In 1881, the synagogue engaged an assistant Rabbi by the name of Isidore Harris, an Ashkenazi rabbi. He had a background in *chazanut*, having studied with Mombach,<sup>141</sup> but there is no indication that he brought this knowledge to WLS – in any event, it would most likely have been unwelcome. I could find no music composed by him.

### 3.8 Percy Rideout and Maurice Jacobson

Verrinder was succeeded by Percy Rideout, (1882 – 1932), who served WLS from 1920 to 1931. He was again not Jewish, and arrived with an illustrious career as Professor at the London Organ School, and a church organist. “His knowledge of religious music was comprehensive and he had written many pieces of the organ for use in churches and cathedrals.”<sup>142</sup>

It seems that, at least initially, WLS did not concern themselves overly much to conduct a search for a Jewish organist and choir leader, who would have had to join them from the Continent, and thus, the second musical era in the life of WLS resided in the hands of a non-Jewish church musician. As well as adding compositions to the stable of WLS melodies, Rideout campaigned for repairs to the organ and to shifting the location of the choir, for better acoustic affect. One reads in his correspondence with the synagogue the pride of a first class organist in a splendid instrument, without mentioning anything of its spiritual properties.

As the situation in Germany turned parlous for Jews, German Jewish refugees began to arrive, assisted by the efforts of the then rabbi, Harold Reinhart, and it may be that it was during this juncture that the music of Lewandowski came into the WLS world. There is a memo, asking Rideout if he had “the Lewandowski book that belonged to Mr Tyler.”<sup>143</sup> It is clear from the contemporary music of WLS that Lewandowski is integral to the repertoire

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<sup>141</sup> Bernard, *Beacon of Light*, 52.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>143</sup> 2 June, 1931. AJ 175 31/1



and thus it seems likely that this might be the year in which WLS encountered him.<sup>144</sup> If so, it would mark the introduction of classically-composed music which is often, nonetheless, based solidly on *nusach*.

There might have been some kind of cultural shift during these years, for in 1932, upon the recommendation of the Music Committee, and with the assent of Rideout, a Jewish musician, Maurice Jacobson (1896 – 1976), was hired in a part-time capacity as Choir Director, and allocated some of Rideout’s responsibilities: “Your duties are to be training the choir at all rehearsals, attending regular and special services, drawing up of the musical services and... the arrangement of the music under the supervision of the Musical Committee, and acting as deputy organists. You will be solely responsible to the Musical Committee for the training and conduct of the choir and will be required to hold such rehearsals as well bring the choir to and maintain it in a satisfactory state of efficiency...Dr Percy Rideout will remain with the Congregation as the organist, but his duties will be confined to accompanying the choir and playing organ solos.”<sup>145</sup>

According to his sons, “Although from a Jewish family, Jacobson never regarded himself as a Jewish composer, per se. Even so, the influence was occasionally apparent.”<sup>146</sup> The second sentence refers to the fact that he did compose liturgical music for the synagogue, although, imply his sons, this was not the source of his greatest pride. As there is a paucity of information, it is difficult to deduce whether or not the presenting issue was the disarray in the choir and its need for firmer direction, or the need for Jewish input into the music. If the latter, and in conjunction with the putative introduction of Lewandowski to the synagogue, then we might witness here the beginning of what will become a rather convoluted return to some sort of Jewish content in the music. But that remains a tiny suspicion. His family took great trouble to distance him from parochial musical concerns.

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<sup>144</sup> Indeed, Daphne Richardson, widow of Arnold Richardson, attributes the introduction of Lewandowski to Raphael.

<sup>145</sup> 26 Feb, 32. AJ175 40/4

<sup>146</sup> Michael and Julian Jacobson, “Maurice Jacobson”, <http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2005/Dec05/jacobson.htm>.

It was during Jacobson's tenure that a choir committee was mooted, which "...would have no real power but psychologically its existence might do them some good."<sup>147</sup> Real power still resided in the Music Committee and with the Wardens, who had the authority to deem certain pieces acceptable or unacceptable. Jacobson was amenable to the establishment of a choir committee "for the implication it will convey to the choir that they are regarded, not merely as cogs in the choir room, but are looked upon as members of the Synagogue in the wider sense."<sup>148</sup> The choir was, at this point, a Jewish choir; advertisements for members were listed in the Jewish Chronicle and certainly some of the applicants mentioned their deep background in Jewish liturgy and its music. Despite this, it seems that they sometimes rehearsed on a Shabbat afternoon, with lunch at the Portman Restaurant – even more surprising was a memo asking if the choir wished lunch brought in for them on Yom Kippur or for arrangements to be made for them at a local restaurant. There is an anomaly here – perhaps non-Jews had already entered the choir?

Rideout, meanwhile, continued as organist; many of the memos are amusing, as when he mentions that he has retained Chopin's funeral march, but cut out the Gotterdammerung March. This is before the war, but it is still startling that the non-Jewish organist would play the anti-Semitic composer Wagner<sup>149</sup> at a synagogue service.

The decision-making procedure continued to exhibit elements of struggles between professionals and laity and, although responsibility for engaging and dismissing choristers in Verrinder's day lay primarily with him, we know that by 1932 the Music Committee had arrogated to itself many of these responsibilities, including asking that all music be presented first to them for approval.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> 11 December 1932, letter to Mr BM Woolf from Maurice Jacobson. AJ175 40/4

<sup>148</sup> 13 December 1932. Response to above. Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Richard Wagner, *Judaism in Music*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Chicago: Aristeus Books, 2012).

<sup>150</sup> 2 December, 1932. AJ175 40/4.

Jacobson proved to be a contentious Choir leader, and, due to other professional commitments, he left his position after 1937, though he remained involved through the Music Committee.

### 3.9 Marc Raphael

In 1932, Marc Raphael, a well-regarded *lieder* interpreter and singer who had received instruction in liturgical music with Samuel Alman, a Jewish musician, came to audition for a role in the choir. He was turned down, on the curiously unexplained basis that it was “not feasible” but he was engaged to work with assistant organist Ben Elkin conducting the choir at the overflow service at Wigmore Hall.<sup>151</sup> It seems to have gone well; the Honorary Secretary of the synagogue wrote to Elkin that, “it is undoubted that the devotional appeal of the Overflow Services was very high and it is equally certain that to this result the choir contributed a chief share...”<sup>152</sup>

There began another slight cultural shift, towards positively encouraging the congregation to participate, to this day, a subject of great debate. Jacobson tried to encourage this by having the choir sing in unison, but this was not acceptable to the leadership. WLS struggled, and continues to struggle, with the tension between the production of exquisite four-part harmonies sung by trained voices, the whole accompanied by a master organist, and the sacrifices that need to be made to enable a congregation to join in, never mind ‘own’ the music. The Music Committee

...agreed as to the desirability of fostering Congregational singing, but felt that the quality of choral singing should not be degraded in the attempt. They were therefore not in favour of unison singing, but felt that the aim in view would as were be attained by choosing simple harmonic melodies for the items selected for Congregational singing. We agreed as to the necessity of propaganda and suggested a letter being sent

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<sup>151</sup> On the High Holy days, the *Yamim Nora'im*, there may be too many in attendance to be accommodated in the synagogue. Many synagogues hold an ‘overflow’ service at some other location.

<sup>152</sup> 26 Sept 1934. AJ175 65/2.

to members, inviting the participation of the Congregation, detailing the items selected for Congregational singing, and asking for volunteers to take a leading part in such singing. They further agreed that the Ministers be asked to announce each item selected for Congregational signing.<sup>153</sup>

It is an amusing twist that the leadership believed that this ‘congregational’ singing needed to be led.

Raphael was formally engaged as Choir Master in January, 1937, and remained until 1967. According to his biographer, his earlier work at the Great Synagogue under Alman had given him a solid Jewish liturgical and Hebraic background, and his musicianship led him to compose for the choir.<sup>154</sup> However, he, like Jacobson, straddled two worlds, and is perhaps more known as an interpreter of art song than as a synagogue musician. The music he wrote betrays no trace of *nusach*.

### 3.9.1 The Hymnal

In 1938, with the desire now firmly embedded to encourage congregational participation in at least some of the music, West London Synagogue published a hymnal.<sup>155</sup> The idea of a hymnal was borrowed directly from the various churches of the surrounding cultures;<sup>156</sup> it represents quite a dramatic shift in the way music and liturgy were conceived. Although one can state that there are ‘hymns’ of a sort within the *siddur*, such as *Adon Olam*, and *Yigdal*,

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<sup>153</sup> Minutes Thursday July 12th 1934. AJ175 64/4

<sup>154</sup> It was difficult to uncover much about Raphael’s tenure at WLS. He was born Harris Furstenfeld, but changed his name to Marc Raphael. A recent popular biography compiled by a former choir member, is the first. Gillian Thornhill, *The Life, Times and Music of Mark Raphael*. (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2012). Bernard’s recent history makes no mention of him.

<sup>155</sup> *Hymnal*. West London Synagogue, 34 Upper Berkeley Street, W. 1 (1938). For contents, see appendix four.

<sup>156</sup> The Orthodox world also considered compiling a hymnal, influenced both by the Churches and the ‘success’ of the WLS hymnal. See Israel Finestein, *Anglo-Jewry in Changing Times* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1999), 231ff.

these are integrated aspects of the edifice of a service. Most music is music that accompanies the prayers – Jews sang their liturgy, word and music a holism. The introduction of a hymnal is an interjection of something alien into the flow of a service, an artificial way of stimulating congregational singing.<sup>157</sup>

The American Reform movement had published its own hymnal in 1897, revised in the 1930s<sup>158</sup> to reintroduce Jewish musical sensibility, “adding devotion to aesthetics.”<sup>159</sup> “... visionaries such as Abraham Wolf Binder sought to restore a measure of historical grounding and a sense of synagogue music tradition... a composer such as Lazare Saminsky began to draw upon... authentic Jewish chants and his research into established melodies from disparate Jewish communities and ancient biblical cantillations.”<sup>160</sup>

It is instructive to compare the two books, to understand the chasm that existed between one community, which valorised musical expertise, and another which did not. The much larger American Reform *Union Hymnal* was published for a movement, not one synagogue, and was issued under the auspices of the American Reform professional body of rabbis known as the Central Conference of Reform Rabbis [CCAR], with the music provided by the American Society of Cantors. The *Union Hymnal* includes music by classical music composers; a small number of pieces composed by non-Jews, including a couple of hymns; and a vast number of pieces composed by Jewish composers, *chazanim* [pl. of *chazan*] or otherwise identified as consciously Jewish.

One might have imagined that a ‘songbook’ intended for a congregation would seek to convey the spiritual meaning of the music to be sung and its place in the worship service, however, the WLS hymnal lacks both this type of reflective or educative prologue; there is

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<sup>157</sup> For more on the use of hymnals see Eric L. Friedland, *Were Our Mouths Filled with Song*.

<sup>158</sup> *The Union Hymnal, Songs and Prayers for Jewish Worship*. Compiled and Published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1936.

<sup>159</sup> Benjie-Ellen Schiller, “The Hymnal as an Index of Musical Change in Reform Synagogues,” in *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, 193.

<sup>160</sup> <http://www.milkenarchive.org/people/view/all/480/Schlesinger,+Sigmund>.

no editorial attribution, apart from an ascription that four of the pieces were used with the permission of the *Union Hymnal*.

By contrast, the USA Reform hymnal, the Committee on Synagog [sic] Music set out their mission in an opening statement. In this 1930s revision, the editors wrote that it should “ring true to the Jewish spirit” and “be as Jewish as possible.”<sup>161</sup> As the liturgical musical trends and compositions of the American Reform movement are to play a central role in the later musical history of the movement, I include their statement of purpose:

The Committee on Revision was actuated by a desire to produce a hymn book which would stimulate congregational singing, inspire Jewish devotion, revive the value of Jewish melody...lean heavily where possible on Jewish motifs...and finally contribute to the field of hymnology a publication which would be essentially Jewish in color, spirit and purpose...Even a superficial glance...indicates how many of the hymns are based upon traditional melodies...But...the needs and tastes of our congregations are...many. A number of old and new hymns have been included which are in the general tone, but which are not specifically Jewish.<sup>162</sup>

It is significant but not surprising that the American Reform movement was more reflective about the place of music in its services because of the prominence of cantors. Without a comparable dedicated body of Jewish liturgical musicians, versed and immersed in synagogal music, WLS, without even one Jewishly-knowledgeable musical expert, could not engage with the historical Jewish musical heritage. And in neglecting to include a preface, WLS omitted to share the process which led WLS to present the music that it did.

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<sup>161</sup>See section on Jewishness in music. It is interesting that this is a criterion in a Jewish world whose early musical heritage in Europe has often been described as Protestant in sound and in execution.

<sup>162</sup> *Hymnal*, 142.

The ‘how’ and ‘what’ of the music at WLS has been examined, but the ‘why’ of music needs further research. It is clear that the WLS tradition was one of beauty in music,<sup>163</sup> decorum and order,<sup>164</sup> its choral tradition possibly influenced both by the strong choral tradition in the UK<sup>165</sup> and “...the general ‘movement for better music’ manifest in...churches throughout mid-Victorian Britain.”<sup>166</sup> Although one notes that, in the late eighteenth century in some UK churches “...the main goal was...to make the music more beautiful...”<sup>167</sup> by the twentieth century, many churches had reclaimed traditional chant, and engaged in vociferous debates about how and with what reverence to engage in singing.<sup>168</sup>

### 3.9.2 Raphael and Richardson

Raphael continued to work with Rideout until Rideout’s retirement in 1955, at which point his assistant, Arnold Richardson, became the synagogue organist. It is also during this time that Raphael, and/or others, proposed some mutually contradictory changes. One of these was to engage an actual *chazan*, which was discussed but rejected by the Music Committee and by Reinhart. In combination with this discussion, there were [further] problems in the choir, in particular, the inability to engage Jewish choristers. It is unclear when it was approved, but, according to Thornhil, who sang in the choir in those days, “Mark Raphael tried very hard over an extended period of time to advertise for and audition Jewish singers, without much luck. Whereas he had enough sopranos and basses, he became desperately short of tenors and contraltos. Since he was a professor at the Royal College of Music, he was able to audition non-Jewish singers from there.....my brother being one of them. That was in 1964.

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<sup>163</sup> Ideas based on readings and conversations with Sidney Fixman, and Charles Broadbent-Bowers, see below.

<sup>164</sup> Kershen and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 34.

<sup>165</sup> Ideas substantiated in private conversations with Professor Jeremy Dibble.

<sup>166</sup> Kershen and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 47-48.

<sup>167</sup> Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church*, 243.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 10.

The result was a happy mixture; sopranos and basses were Jewish, tenors and altos were non-Jewish, and we all enjoyed singing together.”<sup>169</sup>

The use of non-Jewish singers is often debated in the non-Orthodox Jewish world, and their presence is not unproblematic. If the choir is in the role of *sh'liach tzibur*, and, then one might ask if non-Jews may perform this function on behalf of Jews. Allied to this would be a presumption about a lack of conversance with Hebrew? The manner in which non-Jews entered the choir is a further sad commentary on the inability of the Anglo-Jewish world to encourage and support Jewish professionals in the field of Jewish music. Finally, it seems far from the ideal of music and the creation of Jewish sacred space to purport that choir was an appropriate venue for interfaith mingling whose primary purpose was the enjoyment of the choristers.

### **3.10 Sydney Fixman, Arnold Richardson and Christopher Bowers-Broadbent**

Upon the retirement of Raphael in 1968, Sydney Fixman became Director of Music and remained until his retirement in 2010; he worked with organist Arnold Richardson 1948 until his death in 1973, after which time a student of Richardson's, Christopher Bowers-Broadbent, became their organist. He continues there to this day.

Daphne Richardson, the widow of Arnold Richardson, was herself an employee and member of West London Synagogue during some of her late husband's tenure. She indicated that, with Arnold Richardson, there was a conviction that his musical offerings were a 'calling.' Richardson said that her husband felt that accompanying the choir was "praying to God." West London Synagogue and its services became his spiritual home, and he considered himself an 'adopted Jew,' although he never converted.<sup>170</sup>

Of interest is the fact that one of their rabbis, Dr Van der Zyl, who officiated there from

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<sup>169</sup> Private email correspondence with Gillian Thornhill.

<sup>170</sup> Private conversations with Daphne Richardson.



1958 – 1968, had undergone some training as a *chazan* before entering the rabbinate.<sup>171</sup>

Sydney Fixman's early tenure at WLS coincided for a short while with Van der Zyl, whom he found "most encouraging" in terms of the music, although Fixman did not know about his background. This is a most curious circumstance, as Van der Zyl could have brought a depth of musical understanding to the burgeoning Reform world, but choose to suppress his expertise in this field. It is not clear whether the pressure for this came from without or within.

I asked Richardson about the hymnal. A hymnal, as opposed to choir music, invites congregational participation, and I wondered how widely it was used. She understood that, while they used the hymnal for some English hymns, they also sang a number of Psalms and anthems in Hebrew, but by the time Fixman began his work at WLS, it was only rarely used, and then, for the couple of Hebrew melodies it contained, not for the English hymns.<sup>172</sup>

Current Senior Rabbi Julia Neuberger, who grew up at WLS, remembers they regularly dipped into it when she was a child.

### **3.11 The Other Founding Synagogues**

The musical heritage of the subsequent six original synagogues has been subject to far less study and attention. These are Manchester Reform Synagogue, known as Jacksons Row,<sup>173</sup> the Settlement Synagogue, Glasgow Reform Synagogue, and two whose histories and personnel were instrumental in both the movement and two of the synagogues I have scrutinized, Bradford Congregation, and Northwestern Reform Synagogue.

#### **3.11.1 Bradford Congregation**

Bradford Congregation was the third of the original synagogues, founded in 1873/4. They were a seminal influence on Sinai Synagogue and on the movement. I have been unable to

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<sup>171</sup> His daughter, Nikki van der Zyl, attests to this, but has no further information.

<sup>172</sup> Private conversation with Sydney Fixman. Rabbi Dr Bobby Silverman, who grew up in WLS, believes that in the 1950s, the hymnal was only used in Religion School.

<sup>173</sup> For more information, see P. Selvin Goldberg, *The Manchester Congregation of British Jews 1857 – 1957: A Short History to Mark the Occasion of the Congregation Centenary* (Manchester: Manchester Congregation of British Jews, 1957)

find out much about its musical history prior to the 1940s. From there, Rudi Leavor<sup>174</sup> and Ruth Sterne<sup>175</sup> recall that the music they sang was mainly Lewandowski, brought over in two volumes by Rabbi L. Gerhard Graf.<sup>176</sup> Leavor recalls that they were in possession of the six WLS volumes of music, although we could only locate five of them, but he is unclear how much of that music they actually incorporated into their service. We discovered with the WLS music a well-worn copy of *The Blue Book, Voice of Prayer and Praise*, but Leavor is uncertain just what influence it had on their music. Leavor and his family joined in 1950; his mother, Louisa (Lulu) Librowicz, was to prove instrumental in the dissemination of music in the movement, through founding the first Music Committee and making music available to the rest of the congregations.

### **3.11.2 Northwestern Reform Synagogue – Alyth Gardens**

The last of the original six synagogues, Northwestern Reform Synagogue, known as ‘Alyth’ after its location,<sup>177</sup> was also founded in 1933, moving to its current building in the middle of 1936. Their first service was led by the then rabbi of WLS, Reverend Rinehart, who “brought choristers from West London.”<sup>178</sup>

Early member Raymond Goldman recalls that one of the first musicians at Alyth was a former member of WLS, Robert Elkin, scion of Elkin Co. Music Company. Between the twin influences of Rinehart and Elkin, the main musical influence at Alyth was WLS. Elkin played the organ and may have led their professional choir, consisting initially of four male voices, but which later embraced female voices as well; he may also have written something on the music of the Reform movement. Alyth then appointed a non-Jewish organist named F.W. Harding, who remained until the 1950s, when they appointed Joseph Sussman, a

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<sup>174</sup> Son of founder members of Bradford Congregation.

<sup>175</sup> Founder member of Sinai Synagogue, Leeds. See below.

<sup>176</sup> Rabbi Graf was rabbi at Bradford Congregation in the 1930s and 40s. Ruth Sterne recalls borrowing and copying his Lewandowski collection for the nascent choir at Sinai Synagogue, Leeds. Rabbi Graf eventually became their rabbi.

<sup>177</sup> Originally known as Hampstead Reform Synagogue.

<sup>178</sup> Gill and John Epstein, editors. *Alyth 1933 – 2008; The Last 25 Years*, 8.

chorister at WLS, as its musical director. When Harding left, Sussman became the organist and conductor, but did not sing, contrary to biographical notes from universities in the USA listing him as a cantor.<sup>179</sup>

In 1943, a German rabbi named Werner Van der Zyl, who, as we noted, later worked at WLS, came to Alyth. At that point, as indicated in their history, "...the services were modelled on the West London Synagogue and the atmosphere strongly influenced by the Anglican tradition..."<sup>180</sup> Goldman added that "Rabbi Van der Zyl had a great love and understanding of the musical tradition from which he came. He had a vast knowledge of Jewish music and *chazanut*... The music of Lewandowski and Mombach and the importance of establishing a different *nusach* for each festival slowly changed the nature of the service."<sup>181</sup> Van der Zyl himself wrote that he, "...introduced more well-known tunes and prayers that were singable to encourage members to take part in the service... I always called the solo in the choir the 'camouflaged *chazan*'. The singing also brought a little bit more warmth into the services."<sup>182</sup> It seems that this vocal side of himself, inhibited at WLS, was released with the pioneer Jews who moved out into the suburbs, and that, from this juncture, the music of Alyth developed its own unique repertoire. Sussman recalled that they mostly sang the WLS repertoire but also that there was an influence from Van der Zyl who knew the music from the continent, thus adding to their repertoire the Lewandowski and Sulzer that he brought with him, as well as incorporating musical arrangements from classical composers such as Bloch and Gluck. Sussman had a more challenging job than the Directors of WLS - he would secure a copy of the published work and from that write out the manuscripts that the choristers used. Thus, they only had their own part, as opposed to the full score they had in WLS.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Private conversation with Joseph Sussman, who continues to work as a musician and music teacher even in his nineties.

<sup>180</sup> June Rose, *50 Years of 'Alyth': A Short History of the North Western Reform Synagogue*. April, 1983. 19.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>183</sup> Private conversation with Joseph Sussman. Van der Zyl asked Sussman to compose something, and thus was born the much-loved melody to *Nishmat Kol Chai*.

After the appointment in 1972 of then Associate Rabbi Dow Marmur to the role of Senior Rabbi, two issues arose: one was a desire for volunteers to sing with the professionals, and the second was a demand from Marmur and the Council that the choir become solely Jewish. It is significant that Marmur was a Polish Jew, who arrived in England from refuge in Sweden, and was used to a different musical liturgical tradition. Sussman disagreed with both of these stipulations, so left Alyth, followed by the professional choir. With the disbanding of the professional choir, the volunteer choir, led by member Jerome Karet, began to sing in the services. They sat amongst the congregation, unlike the professionals who had had sat in a gallery. In the choir sang a woman named Viv Bellos, a professional singer, who was in 1980 to become the Director of Music at Alyth, and eventually Coordinator of Music for the movement.<sup>184</sup>

Karet retained much of the established music, but added pieces with which he was familiar from his United Synagogue childhood, music from, *inter alia*, the ‘blue book.’ During this period, Alyth had two *chazanim*, Reverend Henry Danziger, who was appointed in 1971,<sup>185</sup> and, in 1976, Arnold Chazan. Chazan could properly lay claim to the title *chazan*,<sup>186</sup> as he had been a boy chorister in a Liverpool synagogue then subsequently studied with some Orthodox *chazanim*. Karet recalls that they sang most of the established repertoire during those days with the *chazanim* in concert the choir. Karet believes that Chazan introduced more new music, but that the Alyth tradition continued to be “very Lewandowski heavy.” When asked why they stopped employing a *chazan* Karet replied, “We thought that *chazanut* was a dying art, not really the right expression for us, as, being a Reform synagogue, we wanted to modernize the form of worship. We didn’t think it appropriate to have a *chazan* bewailing the fate of the Jewish people through history. We wanted to have a more modern musical expression. And I think there probably were commercial considerations at the time.”

Comments such as the above concerning the rites as conducted by a *chazan* belie a cultural prejudice common in certain socio-economic circles in both the UK and Germany, a

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<sup>184</sup> Private conversations with Joseph Sussman and Jerome Karet.

<sup>185</sup> Rose, *A Short History*, 38.

<sup>186</sup> The title ‘*chazan*’ has historically been given lightly to many vocalists who lead services, whether or not they had formal education.

discomfort with overt emotionalism in expression. This reaches beyond a mere dislike of a particular harmonic sense or style of musical presentation, to encompass a service of somber devotion, from which passion and fervor have been excised. Karet's comments also betray distaste for the particular and for history, a rebellion of sorts against the idea that Jewish life has had tragic elements over which Jews need to mourn. It is a sanitized version of Jewish prayer – it is the one that prevails even to this day.

Alyth lent significant support to Finchley Reform Synagogue at its incipience, both as a congregation, and through the individual efforts of Goldman and Karet. And perhaps in a reversal of roles, FRS, having engaged a *chazan*, so too, of 2014, Alyth has as well.

### **3.12 The Association of British Synagogues**

By the time the six synagogues banded together and formed the Association of British Synagogues in 1942, the music used by these synagogues was varied and drawn from many different sources, both Christian and Jewish, English and German, with some Sephardi music and perhaps a negligible amount from Eastern Europe, and from classical secular music. The two strongest influences continued to be the musical tradition of WLS, and that of Lewandowski, Sulzer, and the others brought to England by the German refugee rabbis. There was still a notable absence of public analysis of the nature and function of music in liturgy.

### **3.13 The Association of Synagogues of Great Britain**

The next marker for the organization came in 1946, when they changed their name to the Association of Synagogues in Great Britain. At that point, Sinai Synagogue, Leeds, had joined. As many synagogues engaged German refugee rabbis, it is probable that they brought the music of their German reform heritage to the synagogues they were serving. We know that Bradford, under the rabbinical leadership of Rabbi Graf, established a strong Lewandowski tradition. Sinai founder member Ruth Sterne recalls that they borrowed two volumes of Louis Lewandowski from Rabbi Graf, for use in their services, and that she then ordered these volumes from the USA. As Graf subsequently went to work in Cardiff, he surely took this Lewandowski tradition with him, and it is not beyond imagination that this

music was also shared with the other new provincial synagogue of this era, Southport. Leeds had a ‘cantor’ for some time; more on this later. The next decades brought further group of synagogues into the Association.

### **3.14 The RSGB – Reform Synagogues of Great Britain**

In 1958, the organization changed its name again, to the RSGB [Reform Synagogues of Great Britain]. Although not [yet] a movement per se, it began to operate as more of a centralized organization; the individual congregations were constituents, compliant in some issues, but retaining a great deal of independence in others.

### **3.15 The Music Committee – First Iteration – The Music Index**

During the 1960s, Louisa [Lulu] Librowicz of Bradford Synagogue, and a vice-chairwoman of the movement, proposed the formation of a music sub-committee. The Music Committee, under Librowicz's leadership, set about collecting the music sung in the various synagogues, and created an index. According to her son, Rudi Leavor, "We wanted an index of all of the music available throughout the constituent synagogues. We gathered all of the music and then had the first lines of all the songs copied out, in alphabetical order, with an index at the front. My mother then made use of the new technology of photocopying, to make copies of the various songs. It took some five to seven years. Later, Dennis Sheridan produced the printed versions from the hand copied ones."

When I asked whether his mother was reflecting or creating a Reform tradition, he replied that she did not want to influence any synagogue in their choices, but rather, to present the index and leave it to people to use it as they wished. When the choir directors, or other responsible party, made their choices, they would order the parts from the Music Committee and these would then be sent to them. In contrast to the vibrant and dynamic musical scene in the USA, and the English churches, this was a strongly conservative approach, which ensured that the narrow range of music used in the movement was continually redistributed to the various synagogues, without any kind of judgment or reflection.

The approach taken by the committee served to impress upon the synagogues the belief that this was music *misinai*, music hallowed by ancient tradition, music perhaps not to be tampered with. This approach greatly impoverished the musical momentum of the individual synagogues. It limited the repertoire in great part to Verrinder, Mombach, Sulzer, and above all, Lewandowski. And it created a second rate musical performance; all of these composers

wrote four-part choral music; they had had at their disposal expert vocalists and organists, and the smaller voluntary choirs of RSGB synagogues could not approximate the quality of performance for which these works had been intended. They were also extremely difficult to sing, leaping about the octaves, with the need for lush high soprano soloists. And yet, the music lingered.

How accurately this music was disseminated is a matter of debate. Viv Bellos and Raymond Goldman, the former to become the Director of Music for the RSGB, the other the General Secretary of the RSGB from 1966-1994, believe that the music was often copied out incorrectly, that melodies went around the congregations in odd ways, not necessarily as written. As one of the tasks of the committee was also to help synagogues make the transition from Ashkenazi to Sephardi<sup>187</sup> modes of articulation, the words and the music had to be modified in order to accommodate the differences in pronunciation and syllabic emphasis. Bellos and Goldman believe that this was awkwardly and not always successfully accomplished.

But the music of what was now the RSGB had also taken on the patina of folk song, in that it was often transmitted aurally to choristers who may or may not have read music, and who, in turn, transmitted the music to newer synagogues. As melodies were not always practised from the original, or even a written, score, they were sometimes recalled inaccurately.

One ubiquitous example of this is the Israel Goldfarb melody to *Shalom Aleichem*, sung after the lighting of the candles on Friday night, or as a Shabbat song altogether. It is composed of four strophes, in the form ABBA, and yet, in almost every synagogue, it is sung in the form ABAB. Even in the face of attempts to correct this from a composer's printed score bumps against the stubborn intractability of deeply ingrained melodic habitude.

Whether or not one has an obligation to honour the original intent of a composer, or whether the music should rightfully take on a life of its own, pass into folk memory, is an interesting question. When the late Debbie Friedman<sup>188</sup>, was in the UK at the end of 2010, she led people

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<sup>187</sup> Ashkenazi, or European Jews, had a Hebrew whose pronunciation was based on their vocalizations of Yiddish and German, the two languages they spoke.

<sup>188</sup> Singer-songwriter whose work will be mentioned in the ethnographical section



in a rendition of her melody for *havdalah*, the ceremony for the conclusion of the Sabbath. It was reported that she was amused to hear that everyone present did it ‘incorrectly’, ascending where she had written for the melody to descend. She conceded that the music takes on a life of its own went along with the sung version, the *k’ri-k’tiv*<sup>189</sup> dilemma, if you will.

In like manner, Librowicz and her committee attempted not an ethnomusicological study, nor an attempt to establish a correct version of compositions, but rather, to capture the music of the times, and ensure that it could be shared amongst the synagogues. Bellos, however, is not sure how much was disseminated, as it was difficult both to see the rather cumbersome files, and to print and distribute the notes.

The index,<sup>190</sup> as valuable as it may have been for collating the music of the movement, and now proves to be for historical research, lacks musicological and scholarly scrutiny, and is therefore suspect in its ascriptions. Yet again, there is no statement of the purpose or nature of music in a service, simply a list of music that was being sung or which might be sung, presumably for the purposes of enabling the congregations to find music to sing.

Librowicz was succeeded as chair of the Music Committee by Bernard Pearlstone of Southwest Essex Reform Synagogue. The Music Committee’s members at the time included, among others, Viv Bellos, who recalled that the committee had as their task the on-going project of examining the musical selections of the various congregations, and deciding whether they should go into the index. The Committee viewed their role as one of trying to supplement the index, to support each other and the choir leaders, organists, etc. of the constituent synagogues.

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<sup>189</sup> This refers to a Torah reading tradition. All scribes are to copy exactly the text of the Torah, even where there are known to be mistakes. In a printed version, known as a *Chumash*, an asterisk notes the ‘incorrect’ written version of a word, the *קריב* directing ones attention to the footnotes, to the correct version, *קרי*.

<sup>190</sup> See appendix two for contents.

### 3.16 Prayerbook Revision 1977

In the 1970's, it was decided that the movement needed a prayer book of its own, to supplant the one created by the Ministers of West London synagogue and a committee was formed under the leadership of Rabbi Van der Zyl. Initially it consisted entirely of German refugee rabbis, but Van der Zyl approached Rabbi Lionel Blue to become involved, and he in turn brought in Rabbi Dr Jonathan Magonet. These two became the main editors of the new *Forms of Prayer*, published in 1977. What is fascinating is that neither rabbi worked in a congregation at that time nor attended synagogue services on a regular basis, and neither of them had had a particularly religiously thick Jewish upbringing. This was apparent in the way in which the inclusion of music was conceived.

Each editor emphasized different precipitating factors in the publication of a new *siddur*. Magonet listed the practicalities - the need to update the prayer book to modern English ('you' instead of 'thou'); a chance to rectify omissions and foreshortenings in the prayers themselves; and the chance to create not only a liturgical book, but one that was educational and could be used in home-based rituals.<sup>191</sup> Blue stressed the theological aspects – prayer in the shadow of the Holocaust and the destruction of the Yiddish world; contending with the rise of Israel and Jewish nationalism; the trends towards secularization; and the renewal of Judaism in Western Europe. When asked if he felt that the *siddur* had accomplished this, he responded that “We retained the same prayers, with a more interesting translation, a more interesting layout, but didn’t really tackle the questions people were asking...”<sup>192</sup>

Music was to find some place in this new prayer book. “We noted the virtual absence of music in the old *siddur*; this new *siddur* added musical pieces, songs, both throughout the book and in a dedicated song anthology.”<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Private conversation with Jonathan Magonet.

<sup>192</sup> Private conversation with Lionel Blue.

<sup>193</sup> *Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship. Volume 1 Daily, Sabbath, and Occasional Prayers.* Edited by the Assembly of Rabbis of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain. Seventh Edition. 1977. Pp.571ff

Magonet explained the musical side of the prayer book: “We then added songs that they could use at home, the *Z’mirot*,<sup>194</sup> to give people the possibility of learning things in that context, to use at home if they wanted. That was the musical idea. The *Z’mirot* rotted the old Lewandowski and WLS choral formal apparatus. So we added songs to break that down and added Chassidic songs and the like.”

Here then, is an attempt to resituate some Jewish *Shabbat* practice back to the home, by using the *siddur* as a manual for home use, as is the case in many traditional *siddurim*.

The question arose as to how the songs were chosen. Magonet replied that it began with his own learning process: “Whatever I knew and what I could get from someone else. I spent time with Rav Sperber<sup>195</sup> and learnt things at his *Shabbat* table that I didn’t know from home.” As the work of the committee continued, others requested the addition of their favourites, which were added. It was a learning process for the editors, as this use of music had been absent from their own lives.

The structural concept was that “There were the choices, four or five different songs, over a four- week cycle that would cover most of the traditional stuff. And one *zemir* a week, so that you would learn and sing one a week.” This then would theoretically be taken back to the home and incorporated into one Friday night celebration.

However, in the established manner with which music was handled in the Reform movement, the purpose and function of music was not elaborated. Magonet acknowledged that “We didn’t particularly talk about music. Those with a traditional yen wanted it available, to be part of their lives. Nowadays it is about different things, but then it was about access to the tradition. We were not conscious of how to provide the music – there was more about traditional songs that one ought to know.”

This marks a shift. Whereas previously the music of the movement was either neo-Anglican, or circumscribed and reformatted German classical music based on Jewish modes, this

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<sup>194</sup> *Zemer*, a Hebrew word for ‘song,’ usually refers to a ‘table song’, one sung on Shabbat at home around the meal table. *Z’mirot* is the plural.

<sup>195</sup> An Israeli Talmud Professor and rabbi.

generation began to discuss Jewishness in music, and believed that there was a corpus of synagogue song that was ‘traditional’ and which they began to long to have in their repertoire. It is perhaps the beginning of the desire for ‘authenticity,’ a wish to incorporate the music most closely identified with Jewishness, that of the Yiddish worlds. This also coincides with the klezmer revival, another Jewish musical movement that attempted to recapture authentic Jewish musical traditions. The first new klezmer album was produced in 1975 by The Klezmerim.

The concept ‘traditional music’ is set to become a recurrent motif, and here Magonet, one of the first to espouse this, defines it as: “The Ashkenazi songfest, Eastern European Jewish songs, what I would have heard around the table of Rav Sperber. You have to remember that the UK tradition was rather thin – the previous book didn’t have anything like that. People who knew anything were thin on the ground. If someone knew a tune at some *shuls*, we would join in, but there was no apparatus for that. We were not conscious about providing more than a *heimisch*<sup>196</sup> atmosphere.”

And so, Magonet and others brought to the RSGB the music of the *Shabbat* home, which they themselves learned as adults, sometimes in Israel, at the home of an inviting traditional rabbi. “If you look at the Song Anthology, we added the songs that were around at the time, singable, with music available, and nice, to open up the music.... we just bunged them in, almost an afterthought, what was popular and available and somehow spoke in a religious context even if secular. We gave them a voice that they didn’t have before, an entrée into stuff that just wasn’t there. It was very sterile. Reform services starting with Lewandowski’s *Mah Tov* - this wasn’t *heimisch*.”

This then became a bipartite endeavour. “We put the songs in, then the music committee had to find the melodies. So we gave them the task afterwards.”

Magonet continued with his theme, that the musical additions would bring about a change in the Reform world, but it is a vision laced with nostalgia, sentimental for a world which was no longer there, and which may not have proven attractive to the types of Jews who were

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<sup>196</sup> A Yiddish word that translates roughly as ‘homely’, signifying a kind of warm, comfortable, familiar, quality.

members of RSGB synagogues, those, mentioned above, who desired cooler services and music in a classical Western style:

Lionel grew up with *yiddishkeit* [Jewishness], but not *z'mirot* around the table. There were no home services in Reform, just terribly cold, synagogue-based ones. It was the WLS model writ small. And the *z'mirot* in the *siddur* were to try to get people to do things at home. We began the process of introducing a home liturgy, the other point of being Jews. We wanted a *kol bo*,<sup>197</sup> and a home life, around the table, and we added whatever could help... We added other songs to introduce those in a rhymed version so that they could be sung in English. I don't think anyone ever did that before. We did nothing more with the musical education. It was not our responsibility and we had no time.

It is an interesting irony that the attempt to introduce table songs for home Sabbath celebrations was done by incorporating them into regular *Shabbat* services. The synagogization of Jewish life was already a noteworthy aspect of Reform Jewish life and it was an interesting, but not clearly thought, concept that the inclusion of a song anthology would in itself change things. The music of the *siddur* became part of synagogues musical repertoire, although there were many synagogues that never learned all of the additional songs. This prayer book was printed before the online world allowed for people to find music and listen to songwriters. Without full-time musical professionals, it was difficult to find printed music or recordings, transcribe them, learn them and teach them. The musical repertoire of the movement did expand, but not exponentially.

Lionel Blue had some other interesting perspectives to add: "What was the place of the music? The inclusion of that which was singable and still had a place in Jewish history. *Yom Zeh, Yah Ribbon*, the Sabbath songs. We also added Ladino songs. Ideas of what to sing now came from the *chavurot*<sup>198</sup> like the one I was involved with, which added Ladino songs."

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<sup>197</sup> An 'everything in it.' A *Siddur Kol Bo* refers to a prayer book that is replete with all prayers and readings.

<sup>198</sup> 'Chavurah' derives from the root 'חבר', fellowship, and ascribed to small more egalitarian groups, formed of groups of friends, or established in larger synagogues as small conglomerations of like-minded people. For more information see Barbara Borts, "Group Fellowship Comes of Age," *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 June, 1990, 27.

It is interesting to note that Magonet mentions Blue's *heimisch* albeit non-observant background, and yet Blue himself not only ignores this, but is attracted to the music of a different Jewish culture, the Sephardi world. This was always felt to be part of the inheritance of the RSGB anyway, and, having retained certain Sephardi liturgical practises,<sup>199</sup> the music of this world begins to appear in song, and not, as in Verrinder's day, reworked into conventional choral pieces.

But Blue also drew spiritual inspiration from the Christian world and, in contrast to Magonet's desire to retrieve and encourage the use of what he perceived of as the authentic, unadulterated music of Eastern Europe, Blue finds instances of church music more spiritually arresting, and more encouraging of participation:

In the Christian world, there are lots of hymns, Sydney Carter, and other songs like *God Likes a Cheerful Giver*, simple, easy to learn music. You could catch the music off of someone next to you. These spoke of the things your soul wanted, real and honest. For my morning prayers I sang *One More Step* by Carter, but I couldn't get these songs in, because people thought they were *goyish* [non-Jewish]. A nationalist one could get in like *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*, but nationalism kept Judaism together and anything that felt like assimilation was a dirty word, especially religious assimilation... We used to do assimilation, but the Nazis put a divide between Jew and non-Jew. I mentioned once or twice the music of the Settlement and the WLS hymnal but you knew that you could not get these things in.

Blue hints at a post-assimilatory age, in which one could return to the pre-Holocaust musical syncretism that occurred at WLS and the Settlement, when boundaries, at least for the Jews, were blurred and one found inspirational music in any setting. He believes that this was rather a golden age, broken by the Nazi era, and that Jews feel now the need to 'regroup' and demarcate Jewishness from Otherness. He didn't see music's potential for tethering the experience of the Holocaust, for, as Bohlman noted, "...music was present at a moment of ending, even as death was knowingly confronted...that transcendence was realized through

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<sup>199</sup> The retention of a pre-Torah reading *hagbahah* [lift and display of Torah reading] for example.

the music.”<sup>200</sup> Blue was in the vanguard of a syncretic musical impetus, reflecting as well his strong support for interfaith dialogue and disregard for traditional injunctions against interfaith relationships. He lauds the assimilatory musical project of earlier days. But it was not what others were seeking.

When asked whether music has a spiritual place in the *siddur*, he responded, “Yes, the Yiddish ones had a spiritual connection to people’s reality, to the deepest experiences of their lives but there was some opposition to including them.” Despite the yearning for ‘*yiddishkeit*,’ that did not extend to including actual Yiddish songs. Sephardi music was claimed as part of the Reform’s heritage. Yiddish remained the music of a world rejected, of an expression of religiosity that discomfited Anglo-Reformers.

Blue was aware of the paucity of the repertoire: “The music of the synagogue was fairly fixed: Lewandowski and Israeli folksongs. The other music that could be sung in the synagogue, like *Zog Nit Keynmol* <sup>201</sup> could be sung as a hymn, but that is all.” This is interesting, marking as it does the first clear indication of the introduction of Israeli music, although others disagreed that Israeli music was intrinsic to the Reform repertoire of the time. Blue still retained a desire for Protestant-type service, replete with hymns, Christian, or in the form of extra-liturgical sundry Jewish songs..

Blue described himself as intensely musical, and that the music was deeply moving for him. He showed an awareness of its spiritual, religious potential; it is unfortunate that he did not expand on his thoughts, perhaps earlier on instigating a dialogue on music:

Some of my greatest moments in a service came from music... I was affected by ... recordings of *shuls* from 1930s Berlin. There was great fervour; the whole congregation sang out ...I don’t know if that still exists. Can we replicate that? No. Anglo-Judaism is more moderate in its expression... I tried to get Kurt Weil in, but the people didn’t want it if it came from Germany. They wanted things that were triumphant, Zionist songs... Often the songs had very little relevance to the words, for

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<sup>200</sup> Philip V. Bohlman, “Beyond Jewish Modernism,” in *Jewish Musical Modernism, Old and New*, ed. Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 168.

<sup>201</sup> “Never Say Again”, known as The *Partizaner Lid* [Partisans Song].

instance, the *Adon Olam*,<sup>202</sup> but this is one of the profoundest moments of mystical experience, and no one seemed to know the words. And some songs that needed to be sung in the synagogue... now became sentimentalized, so people did not realize the significance of what they were singing. I felt the need for a new type of religious song, direct, that dealt with religious experience, that was easy, didn't ask people to believe in impossible things, but the time had not come yet. I also got some ideas from an American synagogue on 5th Avenue. I don't go for antiquarianism... also, a lot of music doesn't require words, so you could introduce *niggunim*. Lots cannot read Hebrew... but songs without words are a characteristic of mystical music.

Within this, however unsystematic, are a number of themes of great import. One is that Blue regards British Jewry as staid and lacking in passionate connection to its heritage, which extends, as he noted sadly, to a lack of emotional intensity in services. He believes that there is sometimes no congruity between melody and words, and that music, when set to a text, accompanies the prayer and should reflect the mood appropriately. He opposed 'Zionist' songs,<sup>203</sup> which stemmed from a place of Jewish dwelling and reflected Jewish experience, in favour of incorporating music from German Jewish and *Chasidic* sources, as well as Christian hymns. His views invited serious debate, but they also drew the movement back to the Verrinder era of syncretism, reflected in his wish to include Christian hymns and exclude music being developed in the Jewish state.

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<sup>202</sup> He is referring to a melos very popular with younger people in particular, noted as 'traditional' in a popular songbook for the Conservative movement known as *Zamru Lo*. Jeffrey Shiovitz, ed. *Zamru Lo: The Next Generation*. Volume I – Congregational Melodies for Shabbat. Fairlawn: Cantors Assembly, 2004.

<sup>203</sup> Early Reform was, as Blue exemplifies, rather anti-Zionist, which fit the project of reconstructing Judaism as a religion, of a non-nationalistic, universalist, hue. Blue has been in the forefront of interfaith dialogue, but also of a syncretistic amalgam of Jewish and Christian practices, as well as Jews and Christians.



### 3.17.1 The Music Committee – Second Iteration – Additions to the Index

With the publication of the revised version of Forms of Prayer, there were new musical moments requiring transcripts. Rabbi Dr Bobby Silverman, who was also on the Prayerbook Committee, was asked to assume the chair of the Music Committee and report back on their progress to the Assembly of Rabbis, who had global responsibility for the new prayer book. His tenure coincided with the production of the new *siddur*, 1974 – 1977. The Musical Committee assumed an enhanced role, no longer simply collecting music, but now generating a musical repertoire for the movement.

Silverman recounts that there were no musical terms of reference *per se* within the committee. One of his major tasks was to find music for the new *siddur*, so that there would not be any piece included that could not be sung. “In general, we were to be responsible for the development of the music of the movement. Things were in flux, a new prayer book was coming out, and there was urgency to find music - the object was not to have songs in *siddur* that we didn’t have music for. And yet, the opposite happened.”

When asked by what process songs were added, he replied that the rabbis were asked to contribute, and thus, they would suggest their favourites. One might be chosen for its melody, another on other grounds, but Magonet did not believe that recording the reasons was important.

I asked him if there was any reflection on the place and function of the music. “I don’t recall anything of that nature, no statement about the place of music in the liturgy. It was never discussed. We were driven by specifics.” This is curious, as Blue expressed strong opinions about music and prayer, but apparently this was not part of the group’s discussions. It is possible that Blue’s analysis of the process of which he was a part is postpartum.

Silverman did confirm that there were discussions about the genre of music to include: “What we did discuss was how innovative to be, like whether to include music by Shalom Secunda.”<sup>204</sup> We also wondered if we should commission music, because, just as we are

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<sup>204</sup> Shalom Secunda (1894 – 1974) was a Jewish composer originally from Russia who settled in the USA and composed Yiddish songs, such as *Bei Mir Bistu Sheyn*. It is astonishing to me that he was seen as, in any way, controversial or modern!

producing a new liturgy, so we should produce new music. But we were aware of how difficult it was to introduce anything not 'traditional' and getting it accepted.” In the event, the committee did commission one piece.<sup>205</sup>

And thus, another opportunity passed by the RSGB. Whilst there was money for the prayer book, there was no money for what might have been an ideal opportunity to begin to develop an Anglo-Jewish Reform corpus of liturgical compositions, to move beyond the collation and distribution of compositions that already existed.

I questioned him about using more contemporary liturgical music composed in the USA or Israel, and Silverman stated that they never had any interest in importing music from the States, and probably also not from Israel at that stage, an opinion in stark contrast to that of Magonet and, in particular, the impression given by Blue, that there was a glut of Israeli, ‘particularist,’ music being introduced.

Nonetheless, some new music was presented to the committee, even if not commissioned, by Rudi Leavor and a woman from Maidenhead named Herta Orchudesch. But their main undertaking was compilation, and they did what the previous music committee had done, namely, a survey of choir leaders, and musical directors, asking them to submit what they sang.

As chair of the committee, Silverman was in possession of the index initially compiled by Librowicz, and this new committee added three appendices, two of which contained *Shabbat* music. One was dated 1976/1979, and the other relevant one added in 1980, which contained three *Shabbat* pieces. These pieces related to the new edition of Forms of Prayer.<sup>206</sup>

Silverman concluded, “The music of the various synagogues was much the same and the index was not an attempt to impose but rather, a reflection of what was. It was available for people to copy so they could expand their repertoire.” Both music committees assumed the role of curators of current music, and thus the situation remained, on the whole, stagnant.

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<sup>205</sup> A melody for *Shachar Avakeshcha*, composed by Cohen and Lawrence.

<sup>206</sup> For contents, see appendix three.

### 3.18 Viv Bellos – Director of Music

In 1986, Viv Bellos was appointed Director of Congregational Music for the RSGB, a new position created especially for her and which marks the first time that the movement appointed a professional musician to provide leadership of its musical state of affairs. She worked in this role until 1996, when the position was abolished.<sup>207</sup>

Bellos was and still is the Director of Music of Northwestern Reform Synagogue, ‘Alyth’. She begins her story of the movement’s music with WLS:

West London was the backbone, but could not become the flagship synagogue. They always had a professional choir, except for when they began, when they had a semi-professional choir. The smaller *shuls* could not do that WLS music with their small choirs, so they looked to the German music, [which was also written for four part choir with organ accompaniment] which they either sang in their choirs, or as unison melodies, written down as they remembered them.

It is intriguing that she feels the German music was easier for small, non-professional choirs to sing, as it, too, is composed complicated and richly-textured four-part harmony.

The process was a difficult one at first, as uncovering and disseminating music was time-consuming and presented transcription difficulties: “The strongest influence [on the music at that time] was American. There wasn’t any printed music from Israel, so I had to transcribe it, but in reality, there was very little liturgical music from Israel. It was not being printed, even if it was being written. There was music for Orthodox synagogues, but written for *chazan* and male voice choir, of no use to me. As for Israeli music being sung in, say, *Kol HaNeshama*,<sup>208</sup> there were lots of *lai lai lais*, improvised, harmonies, all sorts of stuff, not written down.”

Bellos was brought in by Raymond Goldman to change the musical culture of the movement:

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<sup>207</sup> At that point, the RSGB axed other such small positions in an attempt to economize.

<sup>208</sup> A progressive synagogue in Jerusalem

I had already started to introduce upbeat stuff at Alyth, and Raymond encouraged me to bring it along to the movement. I brought things from Israel, written down by rote. I then ordered music from the USA, so bought volumes from Transatlantic Music Publishers,<sup>209</sup> introduced the music of Sol Zim,<sup>210</sup> and then Debbie Friedman<sup>211</sup> for the children. In the very early years, Jeff Klepper was the *chazan* at the Leo Baeck School<sup>212</sup> in Haifa, and brought his choir over to the UK. This was my first encounter with the America liturgical folk music scene. I was inspired by it to start a youth choir, and then got hold of anything that was fun, to lighten things up.

Although Bellos did not introduce a serious discourse on the spiritual potential of liturgical music, she did rattle the Reform paradigm, with its pronounced emphasis on solemn, sombre music. What emerged was an inclination towards fun, upbeat tunes, instating Durkheim's insight that "...religion would not be itself if it did not give some place to the free combinations of thought and activity, to play, to art, to all that recreates the spirit that has been fatigued..."<sup>213</sup> Yet playfulness in the Reform sphere is still a matter of contention, as we see through the disdain heaped on one popular melody for *Adon Olam*. Bellos choose from amongst those composers whose music was lively and buoyant music: Sol Zim, whose music is infused with neo-Chassidism within the framework of *nusach* and Debbie Friedman and Jeff Klepper,<sup>214</sup> who drew their inspiration from the folk and folk-rock movements. All three

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<sup>209</sup> Still the pre-eminent publishers of 'new' Jewish music.

<sup>210</sup> Zim is a famous American *chazan*, who writes liturgical music based on traditional *nusach* with neo-Chasidic influences and is the teacher for many modern American cantors.

<sup>211</sup> See below for more on Friedman.

<sup>212</sup> Leo Baeck School is a multicultural, progressive school in Haifa, Israel.

<sup>213</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1915), 426.

<sup>214</sup> Klepper (1952 - ) was "... one of the first cantors to champion congregational singing and to use a guitar in Jewish worship." Klepper cites as his musical inspirations the Yiddish songs he sang at home, studies with the eminent *chazan* Abraham Binder, and "the sing-along style of Pete Seeger, the Beatles, Simon and Garfunkel, Joni Mitchell and the late Shlomo Carlebach" as well as animated Israeli and Chassidic song. I found no examples of *nusach* in his music, and in sessions I attended with him, his emphasis was on how to lead music in a service. On his blog, it states, "His setting of 'Shalom Rav,' composed in 1974,

derive their ‘authenticity’ from their connections to the American Jewish scene, an increasingly powerful influence on Anglo-Jewry, and all three offer melody line songs which are cheerful and easy to engage with, marking a transformation from the more turgid, imposing music of the WLS and German traditions. UK Reform music hereby began a laborious transition, somewhat less interested in assimilation to Christian and English cultural norms, somewhat more interested in a connection to Jewishly vibrant communities in the USA and Israel, in itself an convoluted form of assimilation, because, although this fetters Anglo-Judaism to cultures more vibrantly Jewish than their own, these musical worlds are responses to the dynamics of assimilation in their own right, as Israeli music engages with Arab sounds, and American music with the folk-pop scene.

Bellos attempted to make the music of the various synagogues more appealing through music seminars and choir festivals for the movement, and through holding workshops in synagogues, to help revitalize their choirs. She imparted respectability to the use of ‘new’ music – “I don’t know if people learned this music from me or from another source, but it seemed to me that my doing it made it legitimate.” In order to make the music readily available, in March 1987 she compiled and distributed four volumes of a unison songbook for *Shabbat* and the High Holidays with cassettes; Bellos sang, accompanied by Chani Smith on flute. Bellows notes that she did, indeed, find music for every song in the *siddur*. Sometime later, a cassette was produced by Rabbi Michael Boyden, then of Menorah Synagogue, Cheshire, with songs for Shabbat, accompanying himself on guitar and with the assistance of Judi Rose. He was the first rabbi to use a guitar in services. Technological advances removed one impediment between congregations and music that was an issue with the earlier indices; now one could listen to the actual melody and either order the music, or learn it aurally.

American liturgical compositions and Israeli music began to infiltrate the music and style of the RSGB, but as additional material; it did not depose the older strata, with which it often struggled to be heard. The RSGB musical scene was a *bricolage* of different genres and styles of music which in many respects clearly underscores the nature of the movement, diffuse, unadventurous, wedded to incremental change; perhaps the best illustration of this is the nature of its two prayer books, whose pearl is arguably the rich and mature study anthologies

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became the defining melody of a new style of Jewish worship.... Now so commonly used... many regard it as a traditional melody much older than three decades.

at the back. That might best describe the music of the RSGB: a congerie of different genres of music jostling up against each other within each service.

Bellos's tenure marks the beginning of a more active, rather than reactive, process of musical change. Whereas earlier, the Music Committee's offerings reflected the music being sung, Bellos attempts to expand and alter the musical culture in two respects: One, by distributing different melodies, she was suggesting that congregations try to sing 'new' music, and two, by singing these works in unison, she was helping shift the performative from that of four-part choir and organ to one of unified congregational participation. The introduction of melody-line music to the synagogues made the music very accessible (to those who could read music) and singable; at the same time, Bellos was and remains a major proponent of choral music. She feels that the synagogue choir is a characteristic of Anglo-Reform synagogues and should be preserved as part of its heritage. In visiting Alyth one sees that they attempt, through a visibly present congregational choir, to juggle both goals.

Bellos broadened her work out to increase musical literacy, in the form of the publication once or twice a year of a magazine called Kolot [Voices], containing news about music in the movement.

In assessing the impact of these attempts to improve the musical situation of the synagogues, it is easy to overestimate the interest in expanding repertoire and conversely, difficult to say what impact this shift in musical cultures had. Ruth Sterne commented that the seminars and visits by Bellos provided good training in singing technique and that being exposed to the different types of tunes was interesting. As for its impact on the choir of her particular synagogue, Sinai Synagogue of Leeds, she remarked that, "We had a little bit better discipline, and on occasion added some music, yes. We enjoyed being exposed to new melodies, something different, but I cannot remember a great actual desire to incorporate them."

### **3.18.1 The RSGB Music Handbook**

One of Bellos's resounding achievements was the publication of the RSGB Music Handbook, the first of its kind within the movement. This was progress – an attempt to assess the

importance of music in the movement, to educate people about the history, nature, and function of liturgical music, and to offer advice on improving music in the synagogues. Various rabbis, lay leaders and two musical professionals offered insights through historical exposition, musicological treatises, practical strategies, and a hint of music theology evinced through quotes from the *Tanach* [Bible].

The handbook, although an evolutionary step, stopped short of entwining religious meaning with music. Pearlston, in his introduction, stated that the handbook was "...aimed at stimulating a greater interest in music among Reform Jewish Congregations...and [to] offer guidance on approaches to Reform synagogue music."<sup>215</sup> In an article on choirs, he asserted that "...musical renderings of prayers, hymns, responses, etc., contribute to the worshippers' feeling of "*Kavanah*" (prayer mood) and are therefore a desirable part of the service."<sup>216</sup> He offered a self-help guide to the setting up and maintaining of a choir. But still absent were ruminations about the spiritual quality those who sang should bring to their vocalizing in order to imbue the services with spiritual feeling.

Alexander Knapp provided a brief history of music in Jewish history, offering insights into the manner in which music came to be used in the liturgy, a description of the *nusach* and something on the characteristics of various types of liturgical music. Years later, however, as the *nusach* revival began, no mention was made of the fact that Knapp had earlier attempted to educate the community and its leaders in this most characteristic Jewish music. That this Handbook was not widely distributed and esteemed and quoted is a sad epilogue to what was a promising beginning.

The bulk of the offerings in the handbook revolved around qualitative commentaries and interviews by those involved in the production of services and music, including rabbis who sing, a warden, choristers, a 'Jew in the pew', and a professional musician. There was a presumption that choirs and organs would be the mainstays of congregational music, possibly due to Bellos's emphasis thereon, yet offered some compelling arguments as well for the fostering of *chazanut*. As A. Belkin stated in his piece, *The Chazan in Reform*, it is "worth

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<sup>215</sup> *RSGB Music Handbook*, 3.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

repeating” the words of Rabbi Geoffrey Goldberg, who left the UK to train to be a *chazan* in the USA: “We are heirs to a magnificent tradition, but are we going to be its transmitters? The prejudices, misunderstandings and lack of knowledge surrounding the attitude towards traditional Jewish music in many Reform and Liberal communities is still damaging our responsibility for this unique inheritance...Eventually Leo Baeck College must surely take a lead in establishing a department of Jewish music. For Jewish music...requires a training as rigorous in many ways as that of the rabbi. Full courses should be available for musically-inclined students and for those who wish to take up the cantorate as a profession...”<sup>217</sup>

Goldberg never returned to the UK to work,<sup>218</sup> as there were formerly no roles for cantors. Bellos points out that there were few synagogues large enough or wealthy enough to employ musical professionals, but one could argue that, had this been a higher priority, money could have been found. Silverman offered some theories as to why Reform in the UK, in contrast to Reform movements in virtually all other countries, has been loath to incorporate “singing from the *bimah*.” His conclusions add little to explain the pervasive absence of cantors, but direct us rather towards that which heretofore was not in the foreground; the gradual fading out of choirs as rabbis began to embrace the function of performer of musical renditions, or a quasi-cantorial role. According to Silverman, this was not always the case. “It is quite likely that the absence of it [singing from the *bimah*] in our Reform synagogues began not on dogmatic grounds, but simply that the pioneer rabbis of West London Synagogue were not singers.”<sup>219</sup> He stated that van der Zyl, who, we already noted, was a rabbi with a cantorial background, was the first to sing from the *bimah*, when he introduced the notion of chanting *Kiddush* [Blessing for the Day] on Friday nights at Alyth and then at WLS.

This is an astonishing contention that, prior to van der Zyl, no rabbi or lay leader ever stood at the reading desk and sang a prayer. And yet, we know that there had been occasional *chazanim* at certain synagogues, and that it is traditional to chant *Kiddush* on Friday night during the service, for the sake of travellers. Silverman further contended that this was

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 20. A. Belkin quoting Rabbi Geoffrey Goldberg, originally printed in *Living Judaism* [the organ of the RSGB] in Spring, 1979.

<sup>218</sup> He subsequently qualified as a *chazan*, and lectured at the School for Sacred Music of Hebrew Union College.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 24.



(still?) a matter of controversy in 1986. As a student and later ordained rabbi leading services from 1977 onwards, I can attest to the fact that I, and other rabbis who were musically capable, were singing from the *bimah* with no antagonism from the congregation. Indeed, Silverman contradicts himself when he states that rabbis did in fact lead other parts of the service from the *bimah*. One can deduce from this, and from the article by Goldberg, that there were tensions concerning who ‘owned’ the music and ‘which’ music, some of which seems to coincide with the malaise felt in the rabbinate amidst increasing strains between them and the lay leadership. Perhaps a *chazan* or singing rabbi presented a threat to the voluntary synagogue choir, perhaps perceived as an encroachment of professionalism on amateurism, in a movement that was founded and led by lay people and with a strong tradition of lay involvement, possibly as well as result of rabbis in the vanguard of musical novelty, at the cusp of attempts to improve the acoustic aspect, and broaden the scope of reform services.

Implicit in the discussions about choirs is the contention, as in Silverman’s article, that choirs foster greater involvement. There is much to be lauded in that choir members attend services, are proficient in aspects of the liturgical music, and add layers of leadership to each service. On the other hand, as we have and shall see, a choir can impede congregation participation, where a dedicated cantor can, conversely, stimulate involvement. Choirs are often deeply reactionary in musical outlook, and, looking further ahead to the contemporary ethnographies, shared leadership in a spiritual endeavour may result in no clear sense of spiritual centre and direction.

The tensions simmered, but the centrality of choirs having been asserted, the handbook contains advice about the mechanics of founding and working with a choir, and a consensus that choirs should primarily encourage congregational singing, attempt not to discourage it through a preponderance of solos and sopranos with the melody line, although most agree that there are occasions when “it is useful to give congregants a rest” at various points of the service and to allow the scintillating voice of a soloist to refresh their spirits.”<sup>220</sup>

The most thoughtful piece, perhaps most apposite to the work of this PhD, is another one by Alexander Knapp, called “The Philosophy and Practice of Choice.” In this essay, Knapp

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 9.

discusses the appropriacy of various melodies as carriers of the texts to which they are set. He suggests that it is essential that “...music reflect text, otherwise there will be a rapid loss of credibility in its practical function as a true and viable vehicle for religious feeling...” And then he ponders the matter of what he terms “...the philosophy behind music in the service.” Here his answers are disappointing. Aside from reiterating the need for the music to fit the text, or, as he phrases it “...to enhance the inner meaning of the words...”<sup>221</sup> he offers only two examples of inappropriate text-melody combination.<sup>222</sup> For the rest, he moves on to a discussion of the need for some music to be sung by professionals and listened to by congregations, adding another voice to those who are wary of the shift towards exclusively participatory services, and insisting that there is a place for beautiful music sung well. The idea that musically trained professionals might aid in the goal of choosing appropriate music, educating the congregations about the function of music, and creating music does not appear save for its mention in the Goldberg quote.

Finally, Knapp, as have others observed the passion that attaches itself to discussions about which melody, and drily observed that “...if music ever threatened to degenerate into a weapon...I would have no hesitation in recommending that, in the interests of peace and harmony, music be excluded from all services!”<sup>223</sup> Illustrations of this abound and remind us that music is as disruptive as it is unifying for a group.

### 3.19 Living Judaism

Whereas the impetus for synagogue change in the USA was intra-denominational and targeted synagogues themselves, the UK Reform’s version of S2K developed rather more incidentally. The RSGB, ever desirous to claim the middle ground in the Anglo-Jewish world, desired to launch an enlargement campaign, but a team of marketers (spearheaded by a man who later became the Executive Director of the movement) counselled the leadership to ‘work first on your own product.’ Rabbi Tony Bayfield, the then Executive Director of the

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>222</sup> One of these was also disparaged by Lionel Blue above, namely, a buoyant melody for *Adon Olam*, requested by many, perhaps most, *b’nei Mitzvah*.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 58.

movement heeded the advice, and engaged Julian Resnick, formerly a *shaliach*<sup>224</sup> as Director of the Living Judaism Initiative. Resnick began reading the literature of S2K, and visiting American synagogues. From there, he established a number of Living Judaism pilot synagogues whilst working with the rabbinate as a whole. And in dissecting the ‘dilemma’ of synagogues and their purported lack of spirituality, he turned to music.<sup>225</sup>

Resnick took a group of rabbis to the USA to encounter some of SK2’s successes. He recalls one visit to a synagogue whose former alternative service with its different approach to music had become the main service of that synagogue:

We attended a service of eight hundred people. But it annoyed some. American Reform is a dog and pony show, happy- clappy, not what we want to see here, not serious. Most of the UK rabbis were incredibly uncomfortable...I thought differently. I saw that music needed to be taken away from the organs and choirs and given to the community. I worked on what they should sing, and where to place them, not in the front, not separate, but from within the community. And I brought over Danny Maseng.<sup>226</sup> He made a big impression on some. And so began a foment around music. Is it an addition to prayer, is it prayer? Will this undermine Viv [Bellos] or include her in? The Biennial choir included Debbie Friedman so people encountered her. Viv introduced some of this music, but at the same time told people that it was trash. But it was introduced, and I was able to introduce other people here, too.

Resnick is a South African born Israeli, inheritor of two distinctly different musical traditions, the one, a product of a majority Lithuanian Jewish background, and the other, the informal, casual and assertive music of Israel. It is difficult to say whether he was discontented with the worship he was encountering, or heard that others were, and his

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<sup>224</sup> Israelis who work with Diaspora communities on education and Israel awareness.

<sup>225</sup> For an orderly account of his project, see Julian Resnick, “Case Study 3: Synagogue Transformation,” in *The Sovereign and the Situated Self: Jewish Identity and Community in the 21st Century*, ed. Jonathan Boyd (London: United Jewish Israel Appeal, 2003) 200ff

<sup>226</sup> Maseng is a singer and songwriter, born in Israel and raised in the USA. He has written many contemporary Jewish liturgical pieces and functions as a cantor, although without formal studies. <http://dannymaseng.com/bio.html>.

remarks indicate a struggle with what Bellos was doing in the movement, and with what she represented. He understood the commitment people had to ‘their’ melodies at the same time as wanting to see a growth of potential:

I felt what we did was to begin to open up the *shuls* to alternatives. We were not alone; people in WLS were doing *Shabbat Shirah*,<sup>227</sup> young rabbis with musical skills, bringing that in. But we saw the music as unlocking something and legitimizing something. But not everyone. And it wasn’t necessarily resistance by people not prepared to move, but by people connected to the other music, that spoke to them. And the different synagogues reacted differently.

What did I think would happen with the music? Many of the services I attended left me stone cold, it was as if it had happened near me, and passed me by. Very few people I interviewed related to the services as reasons to be connected to their synagogue. The music left them cold. I wanted to move people closer to the music, and music closer to the people, to participate, to relax, to let go of inhibitions, to enjoy being there, that was important. I wanted to bring in easier, more accessible music. One criticism I encountered was that it almost suited the leadership to be inaccessible, for the knowledge, including that of the music, to be held by a few people. There was little attempt to bring the community closer to the source, to the prayer.

One surmises that at least some modicum of Resnick’s work arose from his own dissatisfaction with the prayer-life he encountered here and his unfamiliarity with and aversion to its alien Jewish musical culture. Further, although he stated that he interviewed people, he did not make clear the context in which these interviews occurred, nor the kind of questions he was asking.

Resnick left England in 2008, at the same time as the latest new prayer book was being published. When he visits, he acknowledges a discernable shift in the musical cultures of the two synagogues he visits.

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<sup>227</sup> WLS’s once a month alternative Friday night service. More below.

### 3.20 Seder Hatefilot – Forms of Prayer – 18th Edition

The latest development in the musical history of the movement begins yet again with prayer book reform. As we have noted, each new prayer book states that one of the aims of its editors is a revivification of religiosity and this one is no exception. Amongst other comments is the remark that one needs to be conscious of, "...a younger generation that feels detached from congregational life...the prayer book needs to be more accessible and welcoming to a wider range of people."<sup>228</sup> In common with all of the other revised liturgies of the various progressive organizations of the world, this *siddur* is a more traditional one, aligned more closely with *matbeah hatefillah*, including the re-introduction of formerly excised sections such as *Musaf*. The reason given for opting for a holistic stream of prayers in place of the former division into six separate services was to offer choice. Because most Reform synagogue services last no longer than one and a half hours, *sh'lichei tzibur* would have to compile and choose from a variety of material in each of the traditional sections of a service, rather than follow the short programme of material organized into discrete sections of the previous *siddur*. Although the main preoccupations for the committee were questions of inclusion in terms of gender neutral language and transliteration, music played an enhanced role in this new chapter of the Reform Jewish liturgical experience - but not for the Prayer Book Committee and its Editors.

The editor was, once again, Jonathan Magonet. He believed that the promotion of choice was good for music, as it could be used "for a WLS type high choral service, or a *minyan*, or a minimalist service combined with a study session. It could be used by those who wanted an organ and choir, or those who wanted a guitar-led service."<sup>229</sup> Diversity is acknowledged and catered for, but as previously, Magonet took the view that one had to be descriptive, not prescriptive, with the music.

As in Forms of Prayer 1977, *Z'mirot* were included as options within the body of the services, but this time Magonet believed "It was about expanding musical options, that inclusivity will happen if people can sing together. Taking it home [a goal with the 1977

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<sup>228</sup> *Seder Hatefilot/Forms of Prayer* (London: The Movement for Reform Judaism, 2008).

<sup>229</sup> I have witnessed its use in different settings, but a number of MRJ alternative services have compiled their own books, implying that the new *siddur* is not as adaptable as intended.

edition] was less an issue; it was now more about the coming together and participating as a group.” What was once an overt goal, to encourage home practise, was jettisoned in favour of the objective of community building, and a new concern, that of marketing. “One is aware people do not have to come to services, so we have to provide something that works for them and the prayer book too. In the seventies, it was assumed that people would come. Now it had to be attractive to make people come. We are in a supermarket, so we have to offer good services that are interesting and accessible.”

This is significant. The movement’s prayer book underlines a key theological shift, from prayer as a spiritual enterprise between a person and God within a congregation, to synagogue as a place of pleasurable social interaction between people, within a congregation, a shift from temporality to spatiality. Whereas the previous *siddur* emphasized home and religious development, this one celebrates space and works to shape the experience people have within that space.

Magonet noted that there already were marked changes in the character of the movement’s music. He commented that: “People know Carlebach and other types of contemporary Jewish music. It’s in the air. In the seventies, there were very few Jewish books and resources in the UK. Now there are discs, CDs, etc. People go to Israel, hear a melody, and want to sing it. They are much more conscious of that aspect and thus, the experience of the service itself became much more important.”

It is not clear that Magonet is not saying that the relative importance of the prayer experience itself has been heightened through exposure to more vibrant forms of prayer presentation, but that view has been aired on occasion. If “the experience of the service itself” was not previously a priority, then not only are we witnessing a shift in the musical culture, but also the implication of a desire for a more intense experience. The new prayerbook has assumed an amplified function, no longer simply of preservation and pedagogy, but claiming the mantle of religious-spiritual encounter.

Yet, and despite all movement endeavours to the contrary, Magonet admitted that they had not really had any new ideas about music and, in fact, had dropped the song anthology in favour of including more songs in the service. He also mentioned that there were size and financial constraints and that music was not regarded as the foremost priority. He admits that

there was no real discussion about how the music was to work because they did not start from the music. “We are aware that most of our services are a kind of strange combination of classical WLS, popular things people come across, Carlebach or Friedman, a hodgepodge. Maybe WLS still has a coherent musical strategy, but other people don’t think that way.” The process of adding music seemed to be the same as with the earlier *siddur*, namely, that individuals would request a favoured melody and it would be included.

It seems clear that Magonet and some members of the Prayerbook Committee were either unaware or unimpressed with the newly burgeoning interest in new perceptions about musical diversity, and the functions of music as textual interpreter. As music moved to occupy a more central role in the prayer life of Reform professionals and lay people, the battles around music grew stronger. Note that in this comment by Magonet, the clash between choir and rabbi looms large. “We tried, for instance, to change Avinu Malkeinu,<sup>230</sup> but choirs shrieked, ‘our music won’t fit.’ We found the one group of people our colleagues are frightened of and that is the choir director, as they can make or break the service. No rabbi can go against them. And with so many songs and synagogues, it was impossible. We were interested in content. Does it help us in our religious life? The music is a secondary support for that. Our job was to get the text. Content came first.”

This is curious. A few years earlier, the movement’s own Living Judaism project located music at the centre of synagogue service revival; Resnick took people to services in the USA and brought well-known Jewish liturgical composers and musicians to the UK. British rabbis attended American Reform conferences and visited American synagogues where they experienced a variety of differing musical styles and a world in which music played an essential role in spiritual expression. And yet, Magonet resisted all of these trends, until, as the acknowledgement in the new *siddur* states “Responsibility for finding music for the *Siddur* was taken by [emphasis mine] Zoe Jacobs<sup>231</sup> and Rabbis Laura Janner-Klausner and Sybil Sheridan.”<sup>232</sup>

<sup>230</sup> ‘Our Father, Our King.’ Many wished for this prayer to be recreated in a more gender neutral version.

<sup>231</sup> See below for more on Jacobs.

<sup>232</sup> *Seder Hatefilot*, 5.

Although the idea of a song book was not his, Magonet acknowledged the need for a more professional approach to the music. He himself is deeply ambivalent about this change in emphasis in a service:

The more you sing, the longer the service takes. That's a real issue. You have to balance the desire to sing together with the length of time, so you have to exercise discipline and choose. So rabbi and choirmaster may battle, in terms of time. I grew up in the United Synagogue. There were one or two passages I found deeply moving...and I want to hear them. The rest can be nice, but it doesn't work for me at that level. For me, it is much more the moment than the type of music. I don't enjoy a totally sung service. I feel the music totally takes over; you don't think about the content anymore, you've taken that away. The Alyth Friday service is all sung. I miss the bite. It is a pleasant operatic occasion, like TBJ, a kind of pop concert. For example, at TBJ at a certain moment, they distribute tambourines and people spontaneously dance as they do every week. I consider that musical manipulation. Musak. I recognise the power of music. A selected piece that speaks to me is better than a sing-along with Mitch. I am too involved with music to want it to be abused. That moment that you really value, you don't want cheapened. WLS is also a choral exercise, but a disinterested choral exercise. There they are trying to be beautiful, not to manipulate you religiously, but aesthetically. Thinking again about TBJ, I felt that they were egocentrically thinking, 'Here we sing along –look at us all singing together.' Yuck.

Resnick's next position as *shaliach* was in New York City, where he attended services at the above-mentioned TBJ. He expressed a diametrically opposite point of view: "For me, if the music works, that's when I can really connect." When asked with what he connected, a question Magonet side-stepped, he responded:

That's a hard question. I'm not sure I can define the 'with what'. I learned at a workshop that people go to *shul* for three reasons – to be with others, to be known, and to have an experience. I am not someone for whom God or spirituality comes easily out of my mouth; I struggle. When the music works - and I understand all the Hebrew, the words are not mysterious sounds to me - but when the music that is



connected to the words really works, I really feel connected to past, present, and something I cannot explain.

I can identify with different pieces of music. For instance, when the Torah is taken out, there is a particular piece of Lithuanian melody that I associate with my father. It has little to do with my musical appreciation, and has all to do with my father. At different moments there are different tunes I get really connected with.

The movement's musical experiences had expanded, its rabbis and many of its lay leaders had visited other venues, and many consequently desired a different, more profound *shul* experience with a new *siddur* that allowed for just those possibilities. And yet, this was placed under the direction of a man whose synagogal tastes were from a different era and stemmed from a different *sitz-im-leben*. And although Magonet did not oppose the publication of a song book - "The fact of a plurality of melodies for the same text is part of the inclusivity-flexibility thing; different voices, different needs" - neither did he support the project.

### **3.20.1 *Shirei Ha-T'fillot*: Songs of Prayer - Music to Accompany The Reform Siddur**

The impetus for a songbook to accompany the new *siddur* came from the Prayer Book Committee, some of whose members helped to raised funds. Rabbi Sybil Sheridan assumed editorial responsibility for the songbook. In common with everyone else involved in this project, she highlighted the shift in the *zeitgeist* towards choice and variety, maintaining that the older music no longer 'works' and that choice in music is also desired. She professed a contrasting point of view to that of Magonet, as she is an advocate of the inclusion of *nusach*, and of diverse melodic ways to approach liturgy.

Rabbis Elaina Rothman, Chair of the *Siddur* Steering Committee, and Shoshana Boyd-Gelfand, then Executive Director of the MRJ were very keen for this project to proceed. Both rabbis received their *smicha* [ordination] from the Jewish Theological Seminary [JTS], the rabbinical college of the American Conservative movement, and although Sheridan disagreed that this had had an impact, it is difficult to imagine that the involvement of rabbis immersed in American Conservative Judaism was unimportant to the concept of widening the scope of Reform music whilst introducing more traditional musical patterns. This team therefore

conceived of this project to introduce congregations to an expanded repertoire of compositions and to educate them in the art of chanting. Sheridan was aware of the songbook that Bellos created in the 1980s, but felt that that was an outmoded volume, with a very different model. “The new one is more diverse. There are two or three styles of music to choose from. The hope is that congregations will do different tunes for different types of service. And there is music for the new prayers.”<sup>233</sup>

The work was not easy. The first ones to labour over the book were musicians, and there was a split between the ‘happy-clappy’ informal type of inclusive service and the Reform choral style. Sheridan says that this conflict accelerated and they could not resolve the chasm between those advocating for such vastly different styles of music, so Sheridan assumed editorial control and brought the project to the Assembly of Rabbis. She felt it was better not to involve musicians, but that the music should come as the *siddur* came, from the Assembly.

She says that the core musical repertoire in the book has remained the choral tradition by virtue of those who constituted the original committee of rabbis and musical directors of *shuls* looking for music for their choirs and assertive about what music they wanted and needed. Included in the committee were rabbis without choirs who wanted simple music, easily learned.

When asked why there was such a fervent desire to relegate Lewandowski, she responded that even though she came from a musical family, Lewandowski is not kind to her, and other, untrained voices, as the registers are too high. She felt that colleagues were straining to sing these pieces. She maintained, as do many others interested in musical change, that “older people derived spirituality from listening to beautiful melodies and inspiring sermons, but now people want to join in, demand participation.” Whether or not this is borne out by reality will become apparent in the ethnography.

Sheridan explained the concept: “There would be one simple single line melody, another more challenging single line melody, and a choral piece. The ideal, however, has not been

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<sup>233</sup> The North American Reform movement ceased publishing communal song collections in 1987. Schiller, *Musical Change in Reform Synagogues*,” 208.

entirely achieved. You are very dependent on what you can find.” She noted that they have wished to commission a piece for the second Torah service, but no money was forthcoming.

Sheridan is not a cantor, and, although knowledgeable and interested, found it a challenge. Earlier on, I contrasted the cantorially-informed hymnal from the USA with the rather more amateurly-produced WLS version, and much the same contrasts appertain here. Sheridan herself rued the absence of such specialist clergy, although she disdained to continue to work with the congregational musical directors:

I was also pretty ignorant and learned along the way. A lot of our music is wrong according to the traditional *nusah*. They didn't teach it to us. There is a cantorial tradition in the USA, but not here, so we didn't know. And once you know, it's hard to go back, like the fact that many congregations use the High Holy Days melody for the *Mi Chamocha* on a regular Shabbat. We are incredibly dependent on Americans for this music, but we do not want to be overwhelmed with the USA model. Our historical ties are to the Western *Ashkenazi* tradition, so we need to keep our own historical musical heritage as well as the beauty of the *nusach* and its different modes for different times.

This latest project, unlike those of former times, is more prescriptive. Whereas Librowicz et al collected and disseminated the music that was in use, a process continued by Bellos, this book aims to alter the music that is sung. There is a judgmental aspect to the new book that was missing in the past, which seems to derive from the current conviction, as Sheridan put it above, that “now people demand participation.” This may well be true, although there were earlier attempts to create participatory musical services, and in practice, many lay people do sing lustily along with the ‘unsingable’ Lewandowski corpus. But there is a further aspect to this, shift from description to prescription, mirroring a change in the Reform world itself. In June, 2005, the RSGB changed their name to the Movement for Reform Judaism. An association has far less power than a movement, but also far more independence. With the shift has come a narrower, more confidently and assertively pronounced claim about what Reform theology and ideology are, a heightened presence of the leadership in the news, and a concurrent lessening of interest in the lives of the synagogues. In terms of the music, this has resulted in a proselytizing element which aims to ‘reform’ the music sung in the various synagogues.

A judgmental tone has entered the Anglo-Reform world. The mantra of the Movement concerning the current *siddur* is the idea that it offers maximum flexibility and thus, Sheridan wrote, "...the synagogues differ widely in their styles of worship."<sup>234</sup> This assertion is followed quickly by a hint of disapproval: "Rabbis of the MRJ... [are] aware...how often we tend to use music inappropriately."<sup>235</sup> So whereas there may be more diversity on the ground, and Sheridan states that "The hope is that every synagogue service leader, music director and rabbi will find in these pages music that will fit their particular resources..."<sup>236</sup> there is a firm resolve here to amend the [incorrect and undesirable] music of these widely differing synagogues.

This new approach also appears in statements Sheridan wrote concerning what people want and how they respond to musical change. She stated that formerly music, based as it was on classical German Reform music was "...designed to be listened to rather than participated in..." and "The focus has shifted from passive appreciation to full participation. Spirituality is perceived less in the beauty of words and melodies performed than in the beauty of words and melody recited and sung in community and with gusto."<sup>237</sup> This clearly was the impetus for some of their musical and liturgical decisions, but based on intuition rather than evidence.

She continues, stating that, in the nineteenth century, musical variety was very limited, which is partially true, but then baldly asserts that the music of the past limited the spiritual range of a service, and that, with the plethora of different musical styles now available to us "...it is now possible to create infinite styles, moods and variations in the music..."<sup>238</sup>

It seems that here there may be a confusion of execution with intent. Lewandowski, as noted above, was himself a *chazan* and whereas four- part choral music with organ accompaniment may impose a certain structure on the music, that is no less the same for guitar-led music. A good composer and a good musical director should be able to vary style, mood, through

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<sup>234</sup> *Shirei Ha-T'fillot*, London: Movement for Reform Judaism, 2011.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid..2

rhythm and tempo, and intersperse participatory elements with solo passages. It is conceivable that some instruction in alternative styles of musical execution might also have added more shade and variation to the music of the past. The rather grandiose, bombastic manner in which Lewandowski, Sulzer and others from that era are presented in WLS coloured the presentational perceptions of all subsequent generations.

It is interesting also to note the emphasis on ‘choice’ in selection of melody, which was posited as well in connection with how to construct a service using the format of the new *siddur*. And there is choice; the book strives to provide where possible musical compositions for the sung prayers, both varying types of single line melodies, and a choral work, sometimes even drawn from those 19th century composers. In addition, for appropriate passages, the *nusach* is included, or the Biblical trope is transcribed.

The second introductory article, ‘*Shirei Ha-T’fillot* as a Resource in Action: Notes for the *Sh’liach Tsibbur*’ is written by Jacobs. She quotes extensively from various educators and theologians about the altered reality of our times, in which “people want to be involved in a very different way. They want to discuss the doctor’s diagnosis...and they want to be part of the conversation. Similarly, people want to be empowered in prayer. They quite literally want a voice in prayer.”<sup>239</sup> Citing various studies, she writes that there is an obsession with authenticity<sup>240</sup> which is in truth a quest for genuine elements of a Jewish musical tradition, and that “Contemporary Jews are coming to the synagogue in search of meaning, thirsty for knowledge and open to learning.”<sup>241</sup> As with all such generalizations, they often stem from the desires of the one who utters them, and are visceral observations rather than the result of research.

Jacobs introduces the theme which has become her *leitmotif*, and which served as her Cantorial dissertation, that music is *midrash*; she quotes Boyd-Gelfand: “Just as the rabbis would create many *midrashim* on a single verse of the Bible, so should we express our ideas

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<sup>239</sup> Zoe Jacobs, in Sybil Sheridan, compiler, ‘*Shirei Ha-T’fillot*’, 4, citing Merri Lovinger Arian, “Music, Prayer, and the Sacred Community”, *Teaching Tefilah*. Denver: ARE Publishing. 2004. 162.

<sup>240</sup> Quoting UJIA study of 2007. Ibid. 5.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 5.

and feelings by creating many [musical] interpretations of a single prayer.”<sup>242</sup> Her guiding principle is the aforementioned typology developed by Cantor Benji Ellen Schiller,<sup>243</sup> known as *The Many Faces of Jewish Sacred Music*. These are derived from a lecture Schiller delivered in 2009 to a cantorial conference and which originally introduced three Ms of liturgical music, to which a fourth and fifth have subsequently been added:

**Majestic** refers to music that “evokes within us a sense of awe and wonder.”

**Meditative** describes music that “leads us inward, toward reflective contemplative prayer.”

**Meeting** characterizes music that make us “aware of the larger community... When all voices join to create a resounding chorus of prayer, when every voice contributes its sound to the whole... we sense both a personal and a spiritual connection with those with whom we pray.”

**Momentum** is the name Schiller uses for music that “functions as the ‘connective tissue’ of the liturgy, carrying the worship from one section to another.” An example of this kind of music is the traditional chant of the Kaddish which separates one segment of the service from the next. “Its familiarity is comforting; its specific melody, chant or prayer mode is a reminder of where we are in Jewish sacred time.”

**Memory** is a recent addition to Schiller’s list. “Sometimes it is the associative connection that one’s memory makes to a particular melody that moves people the most... The music of memory creates continuity with our communal past. In Jewish tradition, particular musical themes serve as leitmotifs for corresponding Holy Days; imagine Yom Kippur without the *Kol Nidre* melody!”<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid. 6. From Shoshana Gelfand, “Making Midrash Out of Music: A Study of Katchko’s Ki K’Shimkha,” *Journal of Synagogue Music*, Vo. XIX, No. 2 December, 1989. (New York: Cantors Assembly) 22

<sup>243</sup> Professor of Cantorial Arts at the Brookdale Center of HUC-JIR in New York City. She served as S2K’s Director of Curriculum and Materials.

<sup>244</sup> Benjie-Ellen Schiller, *The Many Faces of Jewish Sacred Music*.  
<http://www.synagogue3000.org/files/PrayerCurriculum2.pdf>. 174ff.

Jacobs omits **Momentum** when she teaches, and adds that “*Music of Memory*” is occasionally left off the list, as it is a highly subjective category.”<sup>245</sup> However, in reality, these are all highly subjective. Much depends on type of performance choices, as well as the idiosyncratic emotions and reactions of each participant. A four-part Lewandowski arrangement of the Shabbat morning opening hymn *Mah Tov* may feel majestic to some, but represent memory to someone else. Jacobs herself leads the Friday night pre-*Kabbalat Shabbat* song *Yedid Nefesh* in a manner that is rousing (a category absent from the Schiller list – perhaps the word ‘Movement’ might encapsulate those pieces whose function may be to rouse and excite), whereas I tend to lead it in a meditative way. Schiller was herself aware of this to some extent.<sup>246</sup> This kind of subjective, vague language permeates the introductory passages.

The last introductory article was written by Janet Berenson<sup>247</sup> and develops the pedagogic guidelines begun in Jacobs’s introduction. It is entitled ‘*Tachlis*: [Concretely] How to Move from the Page to the People’ and contains a series of stages to follow in introducing a congregation to different music. Modifying any aspect of ritual life is challenging – musical modifications truly tear congregations apart, as we shall see.

The songbook was sent to each and every constituent synagogue<sup>248</sup> and launched in stages, first for the rabbis at an Assembly of Rabbis meeting in 2011, then for those who attended a conference [see below] in July, 2011, and finally, through the post to all congregations in February, 2012, with the hope that “*Shirei Ha-T’fillot* truly will be music to accompany our Jewish lives...and that [you] have fun learning new music.”<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>246</sup> She wrote, “Invariably there are overlaps, for the boundaries between majesty, meditation, and meeting easily blur...” Ibid., 176.

<sup>247</sup> A member of FRS, and project manager for the book.

<sup>248</sup> Due to copyright restrictions, it is not for sale. Each synagogue received one or two copies.

<sup>249</sup> Letter dated 23 February, 2012, from Pam Goldsmith, Director of Community Development, MRJ, and a member of Finchley Reform Synagogue.

In an informal poll of usage of the songbook amongst those on the music list, it seems that, at present, two synagogues use it extensively and it has changed their repertoire; eight never use it; one said 'not yet' but hopes to; seven said occasionally or once or twice; two said they have used some of the songs. Reasons for not using it included: lack of musical ability; pique at not having their own arrangements included; that they use their own compositions and arrangements; that it is not useful for choirs; the reluctance of the particular congregation to change; that some of the songs were already known. There had been some aversion to the book expressed at the Musical Directors meeting.

This book is not is a hymnal designed for the masses, but something rather more 'elitist,' utilizable only by an exclusive stratum in a synagogue, those who can read music and can transfer melody from text to reality. The prayerbook is hypothetically in each MRJ member's home; the songbook is not, nor is there a supplementary CD for people to learn from. It will be interesting to see whether its impact will be revolutionary, evolutionary, or as a footnote in the next musical history.

### **3.21 Where We Are Now**

Until relatively recently (2008), the Reform movement could be described as a liturgically and musically impoverished community, with a limited repertoire of synagogue music consisting primarily of choral works as, until recently, nearly every synagogue had a choir. The music derived from the repositories of WLS, and subsequently, of the German refugee rabbis and their collections of Lewandowski, Sulzer and others, although people do not, in general, remember the music of Verrinder. As mentioned at the outset, the music has taken on a venerable hue and many congregations feel that this corpus of music is the Reform movement's hallowed musical heritage. This music is often employed incorrectly - Lewandowski's Friday night *Barechu* is a good example. Despite the fact that Lewandowski used *nusach* in crafting his compositions, it is not his amalgam of tradition and modernity that is attractive to people. This *Barechu* is based on the Friday night German nusach, yet sung in Reform synagogues not only on Friday night, but also on Shabbat morning, festival mornings and evenings, and at *shivahs* [prayers in a house of mourning]. The omission thereof, as I have discovered to my dismay, brings down criticism and complaint, even if you attempt to teach people that it is inappropriate to use that melody other than at Friday night



services. However, it is clear that people are attached to this piece because of familiarity, often described as ‘tradition’, and its comfortable Western choral sound, without understanding or appreciating the Jewish knowledge behind it. This music defines the Reform movement and its ‘appropriate’ use is of lesser importance than that it be used.

Jacobs continues with her attempts to enlighten people about music. In 2011, she organized the ‘first ever Anglo-Jewish Music & Song-leading Conference’ under the auspices of the MRJ, and a second one in 2013. She has led various sessions for the enlightenment and training of the rabbis, two of which I have attended. Although there is some emphasis on the learning of new, or different, melodies, these sessions are also attempts to instruct a rabbinate which must, of necessity, fulfil the role that would be taken by *chazanim*, the art of making meaning, and crafting musically intelligent and moving, services. She also takes responsibility for the musical offerings at official MRJ gatherings such as the Northern Conference, and the movement conference *Hagigah*, during which she introduces reflection upon, and a diversity of, musics.

Pam Goldsmith<sup>250</sup> supports and promotes Jacobs’s efforts. She hosted a musical professionals meeting, to get feedback about liturgical music in the congregations, and establish an MRJ music strategy and subsequently circulated the list of those responsible for music.

Leo Baeck College, too, is changing. Annette Boechler<sup>251</sup> has been teaching *nusach* to some LBC students as part of the college curriculum, and Leo Baeck College offered a course called Leading Prayer Creatively, which featured four sessions with Jacobs, one of which was on prayer and music. The prospectus now includes a regular course on service leading. There have been discussions about instituting a cantorial course, but, at present, there is no money available. The situation for rabbis is precarious, given the dire financial climate; clearly very few synagogues could sustain both a rabbi and a cantor.

There is another invested American Reform cantor from the USA, affiliated with LJ, who, with Boechler is offering a course at LBC in sacred Jewish music, set to begin in March,

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<sup>250</sup> Head of community development for the MRJ.

<sup>251</sup> Librarian of Leo Baeck College.

2104, extra-curricular, open to all who are interested in learning about music in Judaism. And Viv Bellos continues to organize an annual Alyth Jewish Music Fair, which is always well-attended.

### **3.22 Reception, Rejection, Revivification**

We will look further at the powerful conflation of ‘what I know, i.e. ‘tradition’’ and, ‘what is music that most allows me to fit comfortably into a British liturgical framework.’ I would maintain that the first is the easily accessible reason for the continued domination of the music of the late 1800s, and the second, the one of which people are least conscious. And herein lays the struggle between one mode of being Reform and another. The original music of the movement, that of Verrinder et al, and the music that came to be increasingly dominant, that of Lewandowski, and of Sulzer, arose out of a context in which Westerners assumed that Western music was the apex not only of culture, but also as a vehicle for the proper expression of appropriate models of spirituality, and in a country which, although free of the type of persecution experienced on the Continent, was nonetheless a hegemonic Christian culture which exerted both subtle and overt exhortations to assimilate/acculturate. Jewish identity was less important than British identity, and this was clearly demonstrated by the musical repertoire which carried the spiritual expression thereof. Yet paradoxically, the music of Verrinder to a much lesser extent, and Lewandowski and Sulzer to a great extent, was re-imaged Jewish music, which is to say, it was music fashioned from durable Jewish melodies and the *nusach* of prayer, and, as such was recognizable to those who knew the tradition as Jewish music. Whilst it would be fair to say that Verrinder, the non-Jewish organist, learned about Jewish music so that some of his music contains hints of Jewishness, it is clear that Lewandowski and Sulzer, both *chazanim* and both scions of a traditional Jewish upbringing, were deeply embedded in *nusach* and then strove to re-work this to fit the prevailing aesthetic preference.

The musical history of the UK Reform world might usefully be divided into the following phases, which do not represent distinct years, and which elide into each other, but nonetheless, provide a schema for shaping the developments in musical practice we have examined over the past one hundred and seventy-five years.

**The Phase of Musical Assimilation**, in which the music was primarily in the hands of non-Jews, and Jews whose training and musical predilections led them to create music in church and classical concert hall style in four-part harmonies, the whole accompanied by an organ. The music was decorous and sombre, composed and arranged to accompany a serious rendition of prayers, and it was under the control of professionals, to render to the congregation.

**The Phase of Musical Hybridization**, in which the continental composers, such as Lewandowski, became more prominent. Unbeknownst to the general congregant, this was classical Western *nusach*, but tamed and beautified through arrangement in the normal four-part harmonies and generally still accompanied by an organ or harmonium. This music was, as above, solemn and serious and often in hands of professionals, but congregational choirs emerged and the music migrated to amateurs, in the process becoming rather less formally and expertly performed.

**The Phase of Transition** – People begin to travel, to Israel, where they encountered USA and Israeli music, and became interested in the liveliness of Sabbath *z'mirot*, in the camp movement with its song books and popular music, and generally, in the possibility of incorporating music of a more popular style into the synagogue. Music used in children's services was in the vanguard; there one encountered guitar accompaniment, songs in English, melodies from the *Chasidic* world, and Israeli popular liturgical music. Music began to be more animated, playful, with melody line compositions in a strophic manner. Although the synagogue choir is still pre-eminent, there is a marked shift to greater participation<sup>252</sup>.

**The Phase of Renewal** – There is increased exposure to the USA and its rich Jewish music scene, as rabbis and learned lay people visit the USA, consciously looking for musical creativity. Jewish singer-songwriters are invited to the UK, to lead sessions and services. This music and these melodies thus find greater exposure, as synagogues begin to incorporate them into their services, and the style of, and sometimes even the whole of, the children's service migrates to, permeates, and even usurps the main services. Many synagogue choirs are either disbanded, or begin a pattern of irregular performances. Guitars are more frequently used and there is a call for participatory music making.

**The Phase of the Beginnings of Musical Mastery** – In this period, our current one, musical experimentation and interest in musical diversity accelerates, and more rabbis in particular

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<sup>252</sup> We must not forget that participation was encouraged even during phase one. It was, however, more circumscribed.

have become exposed to traditional services, believing that they can offer an appealing alternative to sterile Reform services. Four non-Orthodox cantors, educated in the USA, offer their qualifications and expertise to, in one case, teach and encourage the use of appropriate *nusach*, and in the others, to encourage both thoughtful and diverse use of liturgical music. They share their understanding about congruence and appropriacy of word and music and thus increase the knowledge of professionals and lay people within the movement. More singing is led by guitars or is *a capella*, but some synagogue employ cellos, violins, and other instruments.

As we turn to the ethnographic sections, we will see whether the phases are implicit in the musical changes in each of the three synagogues, and whether the suppositions and visceral feelings of the leadership about the place of music in the synagogues are borne out by the ‘Jews in the pews.’

## CHAPTER FOUR - WEST LONDON SYNAGOGUE

### 4.1 The Building - Entering The Portals

The building itself is situated in Central London, near Marble Arch in an area now populated largely by Arabs. It occupies large portions of two streets, set amongst a variety of shops and flats but is the largest building of the area. One enters through the side of the building to attend services, from a busy central pavement, traversed mostly by people from the Middle East flocking to the Middle Eastern shop next to the synagogue. One either parks nearby, on the street, or arrives by foot or taxi or bus. The environment you inhabit before you enter will be an oddly unsettling one – both non-Jewish but also not 'really' English, and not Christian. It may, however, be at the same time 'religious', in that you will be confronted by those who declare their faith and their alterity through their dress, as opposed to those who enter the synagogue, dressed generally in fine, but essentially conventionally secular, garments.

Before engaging with the central activity, prayer, and the music of the service, those entering the spaces of the building face three boundaries, signifying three challenges as they begin their entrance. One is to enter into *shabbos* mode altogether. Another is the entrance into differentiation of the actual day of the week, Saturday, a bustling shopping day in that neighbourhood, and, through moving out of the public domain, a mix of private but also heavily commercial, to select a quite different mode of activity than that being pursued by everyone else in the area. And thirdly is that perhaps being confronted by the fact that being Jewish is, at least in that locale, a potentially dangerous identity.

The entrance for services is guarded by two professional security offices, often either Israeli or engaged by Israelis. They are dressed nicely, appropriately for the occasion. The Israelis therefore choose to celebrate their Judaism or at least the Sabbath, through engagement at the periphery of the building. When asked how they decide who to interrogate, they replied that they use profiling, pure and simple.

One enters then into a social hall:

On Friday night, people enter and pass through that space, some coming directly from work or school or lessons at the synagogue. Little time is given for moving from the outside, from *chol* [profane, daily ‘space’] into Shabbat. With less liminal time, one attempts a quick transition, traversing this space, and moving fairly quickly into the antechamber, an area with a coat rack and for the collection of *siddurim*, information sheets containing the Torah and *haftarah* readings as well as various announcements, and a supply of *kippot* [skullcaps] and *tallitot* [prayer shawls.]. It is here that one begins the real process of readying oneself for the service, shedding outer garments, employing a Jewish book of prayers and, at least for the men, donning a Jewish head covering.

On Shabbat morning, there are greeters. One of the major teachings of the S2K/Living Judaism projects was that synagogues need to be welcoming and friendly, and that specific people be designated as ‘greeters.’<sup>253</sup> Again, being a fairly well-known figure there, it is difficult to judge either the reception or its effect on those attending, as I am always afforded a welcome.<sup>254</sup> However, once inside, it is left to the individual to negotiate their social encounters. Time, if you want it, is given for the transition; as one passes into the social hall, it is filled with people chatting, and partaking of refreshments laid on by the synagogue. You begin the process of disconnecting with the outside and connecting with the congregation. There is no music at this point - this is not about spiritual transitions - but the concept of the welcoming congregation is a ritual in its own right.

That the rabbis are available at this juncture indicates that WLS and/or its rabbis accords great value to the horizontal relationships and less to the vertical, in that the rabbis are not accorded private spiritual time in which to prepare for the service. This is noteworthy, given that the prayerbook begins with a section entitled ‘Preparation for Prayer,’ and quotes, among others, Maimonides, who wrote, “...before engaging in prayer, we ought to go aside for a

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<sup>253</sup> Hence the title of Wolfson’s book, *The Spirituality of Welcoming*.

<sup>254</sup> Leo Baeck College and the headquarters of the Reform movement were formerly housed at this site, thus, this is where I attended rabbinical college, and from where I was ordained. I was a tenant for many years in the bedsits next to the synagogue, which they owned. And, in 2007, I worked for WLS, co-ordinating their conversion programme.

little in order to bring ourselves into a devotional attitude.”<sup>255</sup> The renewed emphasis on the spiritual in synagogue services is diminished somewhat by the equally emphasized need to be present to the congregation and is an interesting commentary on the role of the rabbi – even prior to services, rabbinical purpose is *communitas*.

On Shabbat morning, therefore, if you arrive early, one spends time ‘enjudaising’ through engagement with Jewish people, before moving into the antechamber mentioned above. One needs to mention that the children’s area is also situated here. This type of demarcated section is a relatively recent innovation in Anglo-Reform synagogues, also the result of the S2K project. These are spaces with toys, carpets, and children’s books, so that the young families quickly note that their presence, and more pointedly, their children’s presence, at services is encouraged. It is ironic that this space in WLS is located outside of the ‘sanctuary’. In most other synagogues, it is within the actual praying space, sanctuary, itself, however, that is not to say that WLS does not strive to be inviting to the much younger. There are children/family services on *Shabbat* morning once a month and their importance is attested to by the fact that all rabbis at WLS take the service in turn, even their current senior rabbi, Dame Julia Neuberger. The titled and prestigious senior rabbi officiates at the least prestigious of the services, on a rota with the other rabbis.

#### **4.1.2 The Sanctuary**

As one enters the sanctuary, Friday night or Saturday morning, the organist, Christopher Bowers-Broadbent, is playing. He says that the programme of music to enter and music for exiting has always been done - one long-serving beadle felt that this created the synagogue structure, and so Bowers-Broadbent plays for fifteen minutes before and after the service. People continue to talk with each other as they move in, but they lower their voices, an avowed aim; the mood is quieter, more subdued; it sonically carves out the space as ‘sacred.’ The musical selections are varied; Bowers-Broadbent has complete control over the choices of music. “I play a lot of Bach, but I am also known as a performer of contemporary music, like Messiaen. My concept is that this is music and not part of the service. I don’t play obviously Christian music, although I like to play the Bach Christmas piece at Christmas time. No one recognises it; it doesn’t matter one way or the other. I play what I like, or what I

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<sup>255</sup> *Seder Hatefillot*, 11.

have to play in an upcoming recital."

This is quite an extraordinary confession, that the music consciously performed to ease the access of this Jewish congregation into a prayerful, *shabbosdik* frame of mind is music derived from the classical and even Christian repertoire. This sets up one recurring theme, namely, that, at WLS, the quality of the musical offering matters more than the actual repertoire and certainly more than the religious affiliation of those offering the music.

"Interestingly, none of our organists has [sic] been Jewish" notes Jill Todd, in the *West London Synagogue Review*, March, 2012. This prelude which serves as a second liminal demarcation, the first musically moment in time, is, in the mind of the organist, more of a recital slot.

The 'sanctuary' is Moorish, witness to WLS's Spanish-Portuguese Jewish heritage. There are fixed pew wooden seats, marble pillars, a light blue dome of beauty extending up to the heavens. The *bimah* [raised dais for prayers and/or for the ark] at the front is a fixture, a permanent platform for the *k'lei kodesh*, the holy representatives. The members of the congregation sit facing both it and each other, while an empty space separates the spectators from the raised dais, except during Shabbat Shirah [see below], further reinforcing the sense of accelerating arenas of holiness. As you move through space and time, one is reminded mildly of the ancient Temple and the progression from secular space, to general space, to the altar, eventually to what is treated as a sort of Holy of Holies. There is a balcony, a relic of its origins as a traditional synagogue when the women would be relegated to the upstairs, but nowadays it is generally empty; the congregation is egalitarian, and even the *bimah* itself is often the domain of women, as two of the four rabbis are women.

## **4.3 The Years 2008 - 2010**

### **4.3.1 Sidney Fixman**

Sidney Fixman had been the choir director for almost 50 years, before he retired in 2010. His was the responsibility for the choosing of the music for each service, although the rabbis could request that something be added, such as *Hatikvah* [the Israeli national anthem], when events warrant that as an insertion. There were certain comments indicating that various people claimed concurrent musical authority with Fixman, although, in reality, his was the



dominant musical voice. It operated within a hierarchical structure, which managed tension quite effectively. Whatever musical discontent there was did not generally surface throughout Fixman's tenure.

Fixman was raised in the Orthodox world, in synagogues with a *chazan* and *chazan sheni* [second cantor] and after his retirement, he returned to that world, to a *shtibl* [a small, informal Orthodox space for prayer, often tied to a profession or town of origin]. It is interesting that he presided over the musical presentation of a service in a synagogue in which he himself intends not to participate. There is an ironic similarity to the case of the movement prayerbooks, edited by two men who rarely attend services at all. Although Jewish texts stress the inner commitment of those involved in services, at WLS we find a stronger emphasis on expertise and musicianship, whether this be the musical director, the organist, or the choir.

Fixman was cognizant of the prestige of the WLS heritage and felt his role was to "be a catalyst for Jewish music. I wanted people to hear the best available...all embracing, as wide as possible. We play a unique spectrum of music and of what I think is the best Jewish music." For Fixman, this was the 'classical' composers, Da Rossi, Bloch, Milhaud, Ben-Haim, and American composers such as Masinovsky and Weiner. "Nobody liked Debbie Friedman very much," when asked about the absence of this most popular of composers of contemporary liturgical music.

This musical heritage is, in his words, "peculiar to us and I feel it should be maintained. It's not a *shtibl*. It's the only place in Europe like this and it is venerated. It can do things other synagogues cannot do, space-wise, including the organ. They like it, and I respect it, as the building lends itself to the organ sound. No other synagogue in Europe has one like it. It is quite unique." This awareness of the status and prestige of the WLS music was echoed by many of the leaders and old-timers.

Regarding the retention of the choir, Fixman stated that he warned his successor that "Change is important, but you need to keep the synagogue performing choral works, as no one else is doing it. If we stop, that's it, so it is terribly important to keep this going." When asked what the choir adds to the service, he stated that a good choir will add a quality of sound, and can engage in musically moving performances, in which, for instance, their humming in the

background can replace an orchestra. “Choral works also bring more *kavanah*.” [‘Intention, ‘generally signifying the feeling behind the prayer, the commitment to its essence].

Permeating Fixman’s conversation is the conviction that he was creating the calibre of performance that one would find in a concert hall. But when challenged as to whether there was more to it, he replied, “Music is of prime importance – the inner soul is being revealed. It is of primary importance in the creation of spirituality and Jewish expressions. Music will move people and that is important.”

Fixman stressed that he did not want WLS to be a museum, but he had some trenchant criticisms of the congregation. When I asked him why there was no spontaneous congregational harmonizing, he replied that “They look to be entertained. In fact, people complained about one Jewish member of the overflow service embellishing the melody. Harmonizing is to do with discipline and skill and Jewish knowledge– and this is a group of generally musically illiterate people.”

However, Fixman did little to educate the congregation musically. One of the few occasions in which he and the choir engaged with the community about the music came as part of a special programme organized before *Selichot* [Late night prayers prior to Rosh Hashanah] one year. I was present, and found good attendance and interest from the congregation, but this was an isolated instance. The other musical experts at WLS were non-Jewish: the organist Chris Bowers-Broadbent and the choir itself.

#### **4.3.2 Christopher Bowers-Broadbent**

Bowers-Broadbent says of himself that “the performance of liturgical music is in my blood” and even “When I am in the synagogue, I’m a bit Jewish myself, an honorary Jew.” There are echoes both of Verrinder and, in particular Bowers-Broadbent’s teacher and predecessor, Arnold Richardson. Frühauf notes that non-Jewish organists participated in a dance of acculturation (she terms it assimilation, but this, I feel, is the better word) in which the Christian absorbed religious performative ideals from the Jewish environment in which they were working. She avows that this was not true immersion, as it was “driven by economic factors...and their relationship to Jewish Kultus was...subconscious and passive...and confined

to professional boundaries,”<sup>256</sup> but it is fascinating to note that Verrinder and his putative Hebrew acquisition, Richardson and his adopted Jew stance, and Bowers-Broadbent and his honorary Jew are all tropes of identification indicating the acting upon the non-Jew of the Jew through the medium of music. These statements express a space-based predilection, in that they encounter Judaism in space alone not as a holistic, religion with home-based rituals and observances, although Richardson did, later in life, marry a Jewish woman. They assimilated certain Jewish anti-values: the performance of music in a Jewish context confers Jewish status on the performer. This holds for all involved.

Bower-Broadbent, like Fixman, emphasizes the retention of the WLS tradition and the making of aesthetically pleasing music. He, too, believes that WLS is unique, and that the style of the service fits the building. “Sidney, rightly, kept on the classical side of things, as opposed to pop and folk. We have tried to modernize the music, more twentieth century and less of the nineteenth century. Verrinder did try and find ancient Jewish melodies, so it was not as church-like, and it is less so now.” When asked what would make the feel of the place more like a church, he replied, “We did have a hymnal, but really, in a church, they do set music, art music, a setting of an anthem. We don’t do that. We sing the prayers.” He was also adamant that the organ did not lend a church-like ambience, and retorted that this association was made simply because people are used to an organ being part of the church set-up.

Although he is not Jewish, I asked him what he felt the function of music was in the service. He was not able to articulate his feelings about that question, but did posit that people will come “for better reasons than whether they like the music or not. They may come because of the style of the music and the music itself. And as others get rid of their choirs, we should retain ours to be special and unique.”

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<sup>256</sup> Frühauf, *The Organ*, 91.

### 4.3.3 The Choir

The choir itself feels very limited by their lack of knowledge which is compounded by their detachment from the congregation – see below for later experiments in choir placement. They felt that the music was beautiful, but remarked that their only piece of education concerning the meanings of the music also occurred during the above-mentioned pre-*Selichot* talk. For most of them, this was a job, and although they would have welcomed more feedback, in the end, they are professional musicians. One man turned out to be Jewish – he found much of the music uninteresting, whereas a couple of the members of the choir stated that some of the music was moving and personally affecting. In these cases, it was definitely the affect stemming from the music itself and its ritual context, as the Hebrew words meant nothing, although one chorister wrote me privately to say that she had contemplated conversion earlier on in her time at WLS.

They offered some historical perspectives. They felt that the late Rabbi Hugo Gryn had encouraged more variations in the musical settings, and that there had been a more ‘Jewish’ feel prior to the arrival of Bowers-Broadbent, but again, they were not clear what they meant by that, except that somehow the style now more closely resembled a church. There was no mention at all of the then current senior rabbi, although there was some mild criticism about rabbis who requested last minute musical changes; the frustration was a professional one, which ignored the reasons why, from the point of view of Jewish life, a change might have been necessary. Jewish calendric concerns were discounted in favour of the needs of these dispassionate and professional performers.

When I posited that they may be the single most important aspect of the service, they were unconvinced. Bowers-Broadbent felt that this aspect derived from the liturgical words themselves, and that the choir and organist “have the job of putting across the liturgy and the important part of the service.” As to how they are doing, again, they stated they got little feedback.

Changes have begun to occur in this model. During the years of observations, the phenomenon of chanting began to appear, and modifications were made to the presentational aspects of the music.

#### 4.3.4 Rabbinical Input

Fixman alluded to a shift in WLS's musical culture during his last year before retirement, and attributed it to the Rabbi Mark Winer, who had, as we shall see, very strong feelings about liturgical music and who campaigned for a *chazan* at WLS.

The first modification entailed the addition of rabbinically-led unison singing of the *Aleynu*, and the first two paragraphs of the *Amidah*. Fixman was very positive about these insertions: "It is excellent, exciting, it connects us to the tradition. And allowing the rabbis to do this may encourage participation." He did go on to add that there were some complaints about this, but that that it had had no effect on attendance. I have noted that the congregation participates more readily with the rabbinically-led portions, which was later amplified by the chanting of the first paragraph of the *shema*.

Why is this the case? For a minority whose Jewish background was Orthodox, this feels like 'home'. Others tautologically explained that it was an occasion for everyone to join in. Rabbi Helen Freeman agrees. "The chanted bits were added to bring some participatory bits into the main service and to have a more cantorial style. We rabbis can sing, but it is a different quality of singing."

I would add that people find it far less intimidating to join in with other amateurs than they do with professionals, are more comfortable with lower registers, and that the performance-model is dispelled once the person leading the service, unaccompanied and integrally alternates their reading with a chant. Rabbi Mark Winer confirmed that "when we rabbis took more and more of the liturgy, the congregation joined us, really joined in. The congregation was singing with the rabbis, because they didn't have intimidating voices." It is also possible that, at the *Shema*, and especially at the *Aleynu*, the congregation has reached "reaggregation" as per Turner, and are fully comfortable in the role of 'Jew-at-prayer-on-Shabbat,' ready to undertake a participatory task.

Freeman felt that the vast majority of the 'Berkeley Street types' had become reconciled to these chanted insertions, but that there were two very vocal opponents and, as well, the current senior rabbi, Julia Neuberger, is an opponent of what she terms attempts to add

‘authenticity’ to the service. This includes the bowing at various points of the service, instituted by younger rabbis Danny Burke and Debbie Young-Somers.

Freeman was involved in instituting some of the changes, although she herself is comfortable with much of the WLS tradition, having grown up in the Reform movement. She did suggest pieces to Fixman because she wanted “light and shade for the service, to fit the style of the service, even ‘happy-clappy.’” She mentioned that she had at one point considered studying to become a *chazan*. There is a thoughtfulness around questions about how the music will work in the service: “I ask myself what touches me and/or what is good for the congregation. I ask if it is intrusive and if they would find it so. Sometimes we choose pieces that were unsingable and once people even laughed at an unexpected new melody, because it was too flowery. We are not the opera, but music such as Lewandowski is what I grew up with and I find it rich, deep, multi-layered and rather beautiful. We can overdo it, but I like it. I don’t like singing in English, which we do occasionally.” She confirmed that there was still some use made of the hymnal, even if no copies were made available for the congregation.

Freeman has some sense of the function of music in the service. “It allows people who don’t know Hebrew to get a sense of the prayer. It allows community because they pray together, and it brings familiarity and warmth because of recognition. And it can promote a feeling of *kavanah*.” She likes to chant, and has extended that to relearning the Torah trope, which she finds “meaningful Jewishly and spiritually.” She adds that Lewandowski’s music carries the words in a different way. “It is musically, but not Jewishly, moving.” Here, Jewishness is attached to the traditions of chanted unison prayer, indeed, one of its older associations; she is one of the few to feel such an attachment to historical Jewish musical forms. She straddles both aspects of the Reform world, those who love the German corpus, and those who wish to incorporate aspects from traditional services. She has engaged in some study of *nusach* with Chernett.

Freeman places the changes in a hitherto not mentioned context. WLS engaged in a forward planning exercise some years ago called The Vision Project, under the auspices of the then Senior Rabbi Mark Winer. A desire emerged for a “more participatory and informal service than the classic one, and so we established Shabbat Shirah.” I shall describe that below.

Mark Winer came to WLS in 1998 from the USA where, according to him, he had gained considerable knowledge and expertise in both appreciation and production of Jewish liturgical music.<sup>257</sup> In fact, he says that “The central driving force that made me a Jew was the music.” This then would make Winer the first rabbi since Van der Zyl to lay claim to a profound knowledge of Jewish liturgical music.

Winer came to change WLS. “I always hated hated hated the music; this was the biggest downside to the synagogue. Not the music per say, but the way it was structured to do the opposite of what should be done with liturgical music. It is sung too slow, in a funereal way, to call attention to itself.”

Winer is the first person interviewed who expressed no ‘respect’ for the WLS tradition, and this dismissal of their heritage would be one reason why the changes he desired mostly did not come to fruition. He was definitely an American rabbi, embodying the stereotyped differences between the two nations: “I could do things no Brit could have done.<sup>258</sup> There is an insularity to British Jewry. I never accepted that because you had done things the same way for years, it had to continue to be done the same way. I was dedicated to changing the music, every week. I wanted to try many different experiments, always trying to get people to change, to get more involved in the liturgy. Liturgy needs to be about contact with an immanent God and participation is the only way to do this.”

One has the sense with all of the others who have been interviewed that they handle the WLS music as one would delicate china, with white gloves and a sense of reverence, even if that prefaces a ‘however,’ but not Winer: “This synagogue is heavily about class war and they will never accept it...Lewandowski, Sulzer, were for a period for Jews coming out of the emancipation, and proving themselves to be part of the world. So this was high church, modelled on Westminster Abbey. It has come up very powerfully that non-Jews needed to be comfortable here. WLS is inauthentic. It doesn’t feel like a synagogue, it feels like a church.”

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<sup>257</sup> He stated that he played many instruments, had won a musical prize at HUC, sang in synagogue choirs under great *chazanim*, and had mentored and befriended many musicians and cantors.

<sup>258</sup> By the time of the interview he had obtained British citizenship.

He didn't suggest necessarily a whole-scale revision of the repertoire, but wished rather to see it expanded and presented in a different manner. He spoke of the vast corpus of what one might call 'classical' modern Jewish music, composers such as Steinberg, whose music would fit WLS. He did not advocate the use of American pop and folk musicians like Debbie Friedman, whom he considered American schlock, although he liked that people "get into it." What he advocated was movement, variety, and change. What he did not explain is why he found the music of Steinberg<sup>259</sup> more Jewishly acceptable than that of Lewandowski. And indeed, both composers demonstrate knowledge about the modes of the service, and both created beautifully crafted music.

Winer was extremely articulate both about the function of music in a service and what he felt WLS missed in that regard. He had been exposed to the principles of S2K in creating a different, more modern, praying environment: "Music gives wing to prayer; nothing happens liturgically until it is sung. As I found WLS, the exact opposite applied. It was structured to make sure no one in the congregation sang. A choir of angels, playing of the organ, a grill of separation like from the bowels of the earth. This reflects a nineteenth century omnipotent God idea. Twenty-first century Jews need an immanent God, so the music should reflect that."

Winer had two proposed solutions to the 'problem' as he saw it. One was to engage a cantor, a professional *chazan* and to that end he championed Zoe Jacobs, because "she had the least 'professional' voice of all of her classmates and because the congregation didn't really want a cantor. She would have been a song leader."

Jacobs was not actually interested, despite or because of a summer internship at WLS, but there was a power antagonism to the idea of a *chazan* at WLS. Even Fixman, who'd grown up with *chazanim*, opposed the idea because of the *sui generis* nature of WLS and its music. He explained that the chanting of parts of the service arose after the vote was taken not to engage a cantor, which Fixman felt "was a way for Winer to impose his concepts on us,

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<sup>259</sup> Born 1930 in Canada. His father was a cantor, and Steinberg learned synagogue music from him, his own participation in synagogue choirs, and at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto. Temple Sinai, Toronto, website.  
[http://templesinai.net/aboutus/clergy/composerinresidence\\_ben\\_steinberg/](http://templesinai.net/aboutus/clergy/composerinresidence_ben_steinberg/).



which is wrong. One of the founding principles was that you didn't appoint a *chazan*<sup>260</sup>. There was the *primadonna* concept – and the idea that they were anglicised not to show their feelings, so this would have felt uncomfortable.”

It is clear that, not only did the vote go against the idea of a cantor, but that it also went against the changes that Winer wished to introduce into the main service. Rabbi Malcolm Cohen, then the assistant rabbi, was in favour of engaging a *chazan*, because of his fear that there is a “shelf life” for the “grand experience” and the decision not to employ a cantor, or not to change the music of the service, might militate against the long term survival of WLS.

However, Winer had ambitions to transform WLS “into centre of Jewish life in London, to see the ‘Manhattanisation of London Jewry.’” The music was a part of the grand plan Winer had to mimic the success of Manhattan’s famed B’nai Jeshurun. He believed that the UK Reform was not properly Reform, that it should re-align itself with the Conservative movement, and that WLS, a proper Reform synagogue, would reform the liturgy as well as the music, to attract a younger group. “It is an old congregation, because of the music in big part. Young people wouldn’t come; it’s not a worshipper-friendly congregation.”

Although he was not to witness the kinds of changes he had hoped for, he did preside over some fundamental shifts in the musical culture at WLS. And his vision seems to be shared with Neuberger and Mitchell, as they, too, in turn made a ‘pilgrimage’ to BJ, to see how to emulate their success back in London. If this were to transpire, WLS is the most suited for it, due to its location and prominence, but it is hardly likely given the qualitative and quantitative differences in Manhattan Jewry and that of the West End of London, England. One senses another lost opportunity to build something uniquely British.

## **4.4 The Years 2010 - 2011**

### **4.4.1 Ela Zingerevich**

WLS took one step nearer in the direction of change when, following Fixman’s retirement, it opted to hire a singer who had worked in the USA and Israel to become their new Director of

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<sup>260</sup> I have not to date found any actual documentary support for that contention.

Music. By hiring Ela Zingerevich, they hoped to do as all synagogues hope to do, to attract young people through changing the musical culture of the synagogue.

Zingerevich herself was interested in supporting and improving the classical music of WLS whilst at the same time “making a cohesive service, so that the flow makes sense.” She commented that she felt “there was generally no musical centre,” that the musical presentation also impacted on how the music carried the service: “I thought many things were way too slow, and needed to be done significantly faster. I wanted to create an ‘oomph.’” She was the only professional interviewed who understood or at least commented upon the theme of musical shaping in a service, one of the aspects of the tradition of Jewish liturgical music most neglected in a Reform service.

Ela was aware of the historical and social import of WLS’s music:

This place is very unique. It is one of a handful worldwide with a full blast professional organ and choir. The orchestration is wonderful, the fact that you have a state of the art organ, the acoustics, the manner in which they built the choir loft, it’s amazing. Any seat you choose, you hear different people singing. And the fusion of Sephardi and Ashkenazi. But it sounded too much like an Anglican church. That’s what they wanted, complete assimilation. I want to go a bit more native. But I love the space and because it is a rare beast, we have to maintain it. It is a museum in many respects. We need to maintain the older, but build on it. The fusion I saw was unique.”

Much of her initial work was for the benefit in the first place of the choir. She had amendments to make on the printed music itself, and then needed to correct the choir’s mispronunciations. She was quite fascinated with some of the transliterations, including the *ng* pronunciation, which she saw as close to the authentic Israeli sound. She also wanted the choir to understand more of what they were singing. When asked if it changes things, having a non-Jewish choir, she responded, “With the right guidance, no one will know the difference. In fact, it is halachically [from a Jewish legal standpoint] easier to have non-Jews, as *shabbos goys* [non-Jews who engaged in various tasks for the sake of Shabbat observing Jews],” a serious misunderstanding of the nature of work and the *mitzvah* of functioning as a *shatz* [a portmanteau word for *sh’liach tzibur*]. But she was concerned that they “follow the service easily and know word for word what they are singing.” This will have delighted the

choir, who had been happily anticipating her arrival and some educational input into their work.

The only comment made about the non-Jewish status of the choir came from Young-Somers, one of the more observant of Reform rabbis and married to someone who attends an Orthodox synagogue. She reported that “a friend of mine said that when the choir sings, it sounds like a church, but when I sing, it sounds like a synagogue. Ela will do the solos, like the *Barechu*, and it will add something emotional for me, knowing it is a Jew singing it.”

As Zingerevich continued to evince concern about the choir, she mentioned some of the problematic issues imparted to her by the synagogue management: “Matters to do with the choir inevitably migrate to issues of key. I recognize these concerns as well, being a soprano, and a professional choir will have strong and high sopranos, usually given the melody line. If encouraging participation is a goal, then the matter of register has to be tackled. We always have the same discussion here about the music. Keys, are they for the choir or for the congregation? It’s a question of inclusivity – do they want to sing, or be sung at?”

As we shall see, there is still some residual prejudice against ‘*kol isha*,’ how often is a tenor, bass criticized for being too high or too low? I was once querulously asked, “Do you sing high on purpose to discourage participation?” I replied that while I have cultivated my lower range and *passagio* for the sake of leading congregations, sometimes I need to sing in my true register. Further, some of the repertoire is fiendishly demanding, with melody lines that descend to lower notes and then ascend to the heights. Most people are simply unaware of the mechanics of voice production.

Concerning singing or being sung at, she felt that there were mixed responses. They are used to a ‘concert’ and even when they do not attend regularly, as with many other Jews, they want the comfort of invariability and habit, that it remain in aspic for whenever they do visit. She feels that the main services miss out younger people, the same sentiment shared by all of the younger leaders at WLS. Her solution is “to bring in things that sound well in choral arrangement, but which still have a catchy identifiable tune. And we are trying to encourage participation, because singing along is a form of prayer.” And indeed, more and more often the rabbis will remind people to “please join the choir in singing”.

I asked Zingerevich if the demand for quality conflicts with the desire for participation. “That depends on the music. The more ‘classical’ the piece, the better they sing, and the less the congregation participates.” She does believe that good musicians who understand “structure, teaching, balance, pacing, and are willing to lead” are necessary to keep the services working. And although she spoke earlier about “wanting to get them back to the *neshama* [soul], to be attached to Jewish music and to grab the heart of anyone who would walk in”, she emphasized the presentation and performance of the music to the exclusion of most other concerns.

As with all of the recent changes in MRJ music, the dominating influence, the lodestone, is the American scene: “Not many American arrangements work well here. [Danny] Maseng does. His works that are done as choral works do very well here. [Craig] Taubman<sup>261</sup> is a good musician, but doesn’t work. It’s a cultural thing. Here things have a protocol and need to be done in a very specific manner. The USA is more relaxed. Here it has to have a set sound. They don’t do happy-clappy here.”

Many of Zingerevich’s impressions derived from the peculiar nature of WLS, its history and its constituency, and skew some of her views about Britain, as non-choral renditions of both Maseng and Taubman are used in other Reform synagogues. However, Young-Somers agreed with some of the above: “I would like them to have a different kind of experience. We Brits don’t dance and clap like they do at BJ.”

There was hope that Ela would “introduce new tunes, tunes that people can join in with, or that we encourage people to join in with. It may well be the same tunes, only presented differently. Even having the choir out of the loft may encourage participation – it will make them seem real and not some heavenly voices.” The need for new melodies dominates discussions about musical change, however, as we shall see with Shirah, once a new melody becomes the standard melody, a different corpus of set pieces begins to be regarded as inviolable.

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<sup>261</sup> Taubman is an American singer-songwriter who writes much liturgical music, including an influential through-composed Friday night service called Friday Night Live.

Zingerevich did experiment. She introduced a ‘combo’ service, a hybrid utilizing the musicians and melodies from Shirah in combination with the choir and organ melodies of the main service, with the choir sat amongst the congregation. I attended one of these, and indeed, the synagogue was full, although the service was followed by a dinner and a speaker, so it was difficult to ascertain what attracted people. These services have attracted some four hundred people, whereas both the main service and Shirah attracted an average of sixty to seventy people. If one generously allows for one hundred and twenty different people at the two normal Friday night services, then the combo service is attracting almost three hundred additional participants, who may or may not be members.

Freeman is delighted: “Many non-*shul* goers are coming to this service. It is reintroducing people to *shul* who haven’t been for a long time.” In casual interrogation, people told me that they had ‘enjoyed it’ but nothing more profound than that. I found it unsettling, shifting styles and terrain, from grandiloquent organ to the drums and guitars of Shirah, a jarringly syncretic hybridization of incommensurable styles. I asked for whom this service was appealing: Neuberger reported that quite a number of the older people liked it more than did younger people perhaps because the choir and organ still participate and lend this service the feel of the usual; Mitchell, himself a younger rabbi, is very enthusiastic, but perhaps slightly more because of the attendance than the effect.

## **4.4.2 The Changes of 2011**

In 2011 there was another major change with the departure of Zingerevich. Bowers-Broadbent was appointed Director of Music, in a return to the days of Verrinder, when the non-Jewish organist had directorship of the music, to encompass the choir, planning with the rabbis, choosing the music, conducting almost all services, coordinating with soloists, but with no involvement in Shirah.

### **4.4.2.1 Julia Neuberger**

Julia Neuberger began her work on a part-time basis in March, 2011, and shifted to full-time in September of that year; this was, in many respects, a returning, because WLS was her childhood synagogue. She is the first of their rabbis to have had this kind of historical

perspective on the music and services. She remembers the hymnal as having been used a lot in the children's services until 1959, with Christian anthems sung in English, and on a Shabbat morning. In her remembrance, it was very organ focused and non-participative, but she notes that her father "liked the propriety of it and that you didn't join in, but you let your brain join in." Despite her discontent, she does believe that things have changed: "It is completely different since my childhood." This revolves around the sanctuary service, and the experimental Combo service, although she feels that, with the exception of the addition of *leyning* [chanting the Torah], Saturday services have not changed,

She adds her concerns to the general trend of rabbinical dissatisfaction with the lack of participation: "Participation, well, I suppose it is owning the service, making it yours, that you are taking part of it and that the majority join in, taking it away from being a performance. There are a mixture of reasons I don't want this to be a performance. Performance lets you off the hook, so you don't learn anything, or do anything. It allows you to sit back and go 'phew, it is the end of the week;' that is not such a bad thing, but '*avodah*' is about making an effort, that it is not done to you, but about something you give."

It is interesting from a philological point of view that she employs the translation of 'work' for '*avodah*,' instead of the more commonly used 'prayer.' Turner has written that "...in many societies ritual, too, is described as 'work,' and the term 'liturgy...' also derives from Greek terms meaning..."work." Work is indeed performed by these reflexive genres, the work of sustaining cherished social and cultural principles and forms..."<sup>262</sup> By this, she suggests that one needs to work at the prayer enterprise somewhat, which is an opposite view to the current one which suggests that prayer, though its music, should be easily accessible.

Neuberger is, in many respects, an outlier both theologically and musically. She speaks of her ultimate aim in a language that seems rather old-fashioned and anglicized; it is a danger when using English words, more often applied to Christian theological discourse; it is neither the language of the contemporary spiritual search, nor of a Jewishly-determined *chozer bateshuvah*, [a 'returnee;' exploring Jewish practises and rituals.] "I am working towards a sense of the glory of God and of the sublime." In fact, she is quite dismissive of attempts to

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<sup>262</sup> Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987), 26.

ground the music in traditional Jewish modes: “I am really irritated by the amount people want to use *nusach*, which takes us even further from meaning - if one is chanting the *Aleynu*, you are much further from understanding what it means. I prefer to read; I know what it says because my Hebrew is good. For me, it is harder to concentrate when a service is chanted. There is a search for authenticity that is deeply mistaken. People should look for meaning, not authenticity. The reading of the Torah is to teach and learn, not to chant so no one can understand.”

She is, however, a democrat, extending to the rabbinical team the same sense of participation and choice she wishes to offer the congregation, and confers upon them the right to choose their own way. “We need lots of catering for different tastes, and we need variety.” She adds that she eschews value judgments concerning what is right and wrong.

Despite this, Neuberger is more firmly in command than previous rabbis have been. The decision-making process is in flux and rather diffuse, but she has a firm idea of where things are to move. “Decisions are made by the group of rabbis and Chris - and the wardens - based on what we want the direction to be. He is sympathetic. We say what we want to try, and he is experimental. He knows a lot. But the final say stops with me.” However, Bowers-Broadbent does take the lead in making musical suggestions, to which the rabbis answer “yes, no and maybe, but usually yes. We choose because the piece we have done before is too slow, so we might want to move on from that, or because something is genuinely interesting and the congregation would like it. Or things that are seasonal. We want variety, so it is interesting. It is not systematic.”

Her vision is two-fold; to increase participation, and to increase knowledge of the WLS corpus. Concerning the former goal, she says that

I think music is essential, but it needs to be quite participatory, because a service is not a performance, although I don’t expect them to join in everything. But the pitch is too high, so absurd. So, ideally, there should be a mixture of performance-based traditional WLS music, but something also more participative. So we’ve appointed a community musician, who will sing using the usual music, but pitched lower, so people can join in and love it. That’s first, to get them to join in, even if it is with the

happy-clappy Adon Olam. It just feels different if the congregation joins in more. They do join in at Goldsmith Hall [the overflow venue for the High Holy Days].

Along with David Mitchell, Neuberger voyaged to the USA to explore musical synagogues there, and, from this experience, they changed the evening service, so that, after *Lecha Dodi*, everyone greets each other. She feels that people love this. “It’s a matter of how we pace the service, so they feel included at the beginning, but everyone can blast out *Mah Tov*, and still have the greeting part.”

She gives the impression that WLS will offer many alternatives, rather than come together with one single model of service; and, by her own admission, it is not terribly systematically planned. “There will be some Maseng, a bit of Debbie Friedman; we’ll play with it, some Sephardi music. I want to do more of that.” She believes that, although some congregants cannot bear these changes, most love them.

Her emphasis is on altering the Friday night services, as she rarely mentions change on Shabbat morning. “People need familiarity, but also a bit of fun. *Erev Shabbat* should be really joyful – it’s the beginning of rest, it should be joyful, with the family around the table. people really do want that. The dinner here is always over- subscribed.” It is interesting that she relocates home-based Friday night celebrations to the synagogue, and indeed, if space trumps time, then dinners should be an increasing feature of progressive Jewish life.

Her second goal, or rather ‘mission,’ converges with her expertise in musical criticism. “Music is enormously important to me; I do lots of broadcasts on music,” and, as well, has written an introduction to a book on classical music written by composers with a Jewish background. As such, she is the only rabbi or musical director to root herself so firmly in the European Classical music tradition. “This music hugely shapes my identity. I am interested in Jewish music, but also, music of Jewish interest, like Schubert’s Psalm 92. I’m interested in the use of Hebrew in vernacular music, and in the where and why it happened. I’m less interested in Jewish people who are musicians, but I do find interesting cantors who were also opera singers and also a well-known Jewish opera teacher who, throughout the Holocaust, continued to teach non-Jewish singers.”



When asked what is the Jewish music that she is involved with, she replied, “With the exception of the *nusach*, and maybe it comes from plainsong, but we are syncretic by nature, so I cannot say what is Jewish music. I’m not sure, music by Jewish composers? In a service, it’s not important. The music we are using for the traditional Jewish service wasn’t so different from the Christians, and the singers also sang in the opera.”

She wants to educate the congregation about this musical heritage and increase exposure to it. One way would be to “resurrect the music that was written and forgotten, and use it;” another would be to delve more deeply into German music. “I want people to understand what German music was. It tells more about the history of the period than anything else and places you more historically if you know why people used the music they did.”

#### **4.4.4 David Mitchell**

In November, 2011, another young assistant rabbi began his work at WLS. Mitchell stemmed originally from an observant Orthodox background, unlike the other rabbis who were from Reform families. He is, in a similar way to the other younger rabbis, a powerful critic of the musical set-up at WLS. “I was not wanting to go to WLS because of the services. None of the younger rabbis who went there found it a spiritual place. So if younger rabbis are not engaged why should we expect the younger people to be so? Generally, there is an older group at services.”

He feels strongly about participatory singing. “If we can’t sing, we can’t be spiritually engaged.” He is aware of the “legacy of the main sanctuary service, and of my great responsibility to be the guardian of a great heritage, but I don’t want to pray in a museum.” And for him the key is expanding, “a variety of services, to appeal to a variety of people, and a variety of service leaders. We need variety here – there is no one size in Jewish music.” He quips that “there is a demand to preserve the past but embrace the future. Even the present would be a start.”

Mitchell spoke of the purpose of music in a service being “the transit of the mood of the passage that it is conveying, a vehicle for the liturgy, but also with the ability to engage, enthrall, titillate and make a space for, a place for, congregants to feel comfort, lift. It beautifies the mitzvah and it is primal, particularly the tempo.” He says that, he expects

services to be “deeply connected to spirituality” but is aware that others come for other types of experiences.

In Mitchell’s view, music pretty much carries the whole of the experience, or at least, the affective side, with little weight placed on the words of the prayers, the actual presence of others, or the sermon, which is interesting in a service where the verbal has at least pride of place with the musical. This derives from his own experience of music, in which “it only takes a few bars of music to send me into memory, sensory feeling, etc. And it’s not exclusively Jewish, but international and throughout time.” This is a rather clear example of the assertions people make about music, based on their own perceptual framework.

He does admit to some quality that WLS is able to inject that may be missing in other services. In speaking of the *V’shamru* that WLS uses on a Friday night, he mused that, “When it comes to *V’shamru*, there is something in the look of people’s faces, saying that Shabbat enters them, and they enter Shabbat. I’ve been to the happy-clappy services, and FRS, and there *simcha* [joy] enters, but maybe not the *menucha* [rest].”

Mitchell’s primary work is with Shirah, and within his exultative remarks, is a hint of hesitation, of awareness of music’s supercessionist power. “I love Shirah, I love the drums, I like the rhythm, I like dance in prayer. Like at BJ, if it’s the right *Lecha Dodi* and has the right beat, I can feel every beat of the prayer. But if the tune is just there to dance, it doesn’t work for me.” He then returns to the positives of Shirah, “I like the rhythm, the music, the group leading it, and the people who are there to join in. It is informal, has reflective and meditative sides, and it takes you on a journey.” For him, that journey is missing in the main service, and firmly adhering to this conviction precludes receptivity to hints of transcendence thorough this other, rejected, music.

Many of his comments stem from his conviction about a generational chasm, with Shirah on the side of the young: “We are people in an historic sanctuary, being as modern as can be. It feels like the musical edge of modern music. The post-sixties get upset if one doesn’t sing their tunes. It’s definitely a younger thing.” When challenged by the evidence that there is a mix of ages at Shirah, as there is at the main service, he modified his response to include “the young at heart, older people who want something more in this day and age, more ‘last night of the proms’ than first night. This is for people who are coming along to get involved, not

just to experience.” And the youth-centred nature of the service is more pronounced since his advent, with invitations to go out for a meal afterwards directed to the young, even if he then adds that ‘youth is in the eye of the beholder.’

He is aware that his role entails some compromise when attempting to satisfying his own spiritual needs: “Sometimes I am there in a position of employment to facilitate other people’s prayers, and not to have a prayerful experience. But at LBC, I was told that people would connect to my spiritual experience.” It seems that none of the lecturers in liturgy demonstrated how one can find meaning in a service not of one’s own style and then convey that to others. If the music is not right for me, he seems to imply, then I am not experiencing what I need to experience and therefore, cannot communicate it to others. And yet, at WLS, the rabbis are not expected to carry the spiritual experience – that is carried by those who produce the music and by the grandeur of the architecture.<sup>263</sup> One could assert that the rabbis have little direct impact on the spiritual aura altogether, except for the brief moments of unadorned chant. I worked once in such a multi-media synagogue, with a fully concealed professional choir of non-Jews, a non-Jewish organist, and a female soloist with an exquisite voice. At the end of the service, invariably, effusive comments were reserved for the singing, with only occasional remarks about the sermons. The only way to influence the spirit of the service is to hold the whole of it, that is, its music, rhythm and pace, the ‘heart of the service.’

For Mitchell, there is an overarching need for the congregation to get involved, to be ‘empowered’ and musical contribution is emblematic of this. Here again we find music bearing the weight of other perceived needs and expectations. “I would have a mixture of modern music, a couple of the real WLS corks, have people dancing, a full band, no non-Jews and only volunteers. I would have people feel great sense of ownership of their service. This goes along with whole culture of over- professionalization and this is massively to its detriment, in terms of people’s feelings towards community. I have a big thing about volunteering.”

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<sup>263</sup> For a stunning treatise on architecture which was epiphanic, see Lindsay Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpretation, Comparison, Vol.1. One/Monumental Occasions: Reflections on the Eventfulness of Religious Architecture* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Nonetheless, these are the beginnings of some significant modifications in the WLS musical culture. The congregation engaged member Maya Levy as ‘Community Musician,’ to develop lay involvement in the music of WLS. Levy has built upon a concept of Zingerevich’s, ‘Sing with Your Heart,’ an informal sing-a-long on a Sunday during religious school. She officiates as a soloist at services when the choir is on break, and they anticipate that she will develop both a youth choir, and a general WLS lay choir.

In attending one of these services, I noted that she was, erroneously, introduced as a cantor. Her professionally-trained voice struggled to lead as the rabbis, with nice but not proficient voices, sang into microphones beside her. The effect was jarring; there was a greater modicum of participation, however, the voices clashed and clanged. She has since requested they not sing into the microphone when she is present. As if simply to replace soloist for choir, the formal presentational style will be maintained. And with this, the heretofore fearful reactions to cantors have been somewhat allayed. Had they known that this is what it was, a solo voice leading us in song, reports Freeman, they would not have objected so vehemently. Some of that might be attributed to the manner in which Winer pushed the cantorial agenda. But WLS will continue to place lovely voices at the front of the congregation, whether it be soloist or choir; it is not a service for guitar-strumming song leaders.

## **4.5 Musical and Liturgical Decision-Making – The Lay Leadership**

WLS eschewed the normal MRJ congregational committee structure in favour of organizing its work around the traditional categories of a synagogue.<sup>264</sup>

### **4.5.1 Structures of Decision-Making – Beit Tefilah**

DP was the Vice-Chair<sup>265</sup> of the synagogue in charge of *Beit Tefilah*, which states that its purpose is

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<sup>264</sup> Beit Tefilah and Beit Midrash are also present, but Beit Knesset stands for the administrative functions of the synagogue, and an invented category, Beit Am, for those functions usually found under the Beit Knesset rubric.

<sup>265</sup> WLS has five vice-chairwomen and men.

To encourage and facilitate diverse opportunities for personal and communal worship. We work to offer a variety of routes into meaningful prayer that draws us spiritually closer to God, Torah and each other. Our core values:

- To meet the needs of all congregational members, whether spiritual, educational, or communal.
- To experience and promote Jewish spirituality and practice.
- To welcome all service attendees and encourage participation and involvement.
- To build upon our rich Jewish heritage”<sup>266</sup>

This is an impressive, deeply thought out way of understanding the nature of prayer in a synagogue, but it clearly delimits spiritual involvement to the sphere of the building. No mention is made here of transferable spirituality and Jewish practise in the home.

DP says that they discuss music much more than they used to. He presided over a group dedicated both to finding a replacement for Fixman and considering the music of now and the future. One of their tasks was to preserve and archive the physical music, a global neglect mentioned in the history chapter.

So what of music at WLS? Our conversation highlighted some of the contradictions implicit in the conflict over the musical shape of its services. On the one hand, he ascribed the lack of change firmly to Fixman. On the other hand, he stated that “you sing one new piece and you get thousands of complaints. We have to honour the congregation, and it that’s what they want, we have to change in a very slow manner.” Much of the discussion about new music centred around one striking new piece, *V’al Kulam*, one I also noted, and which DP said both he and his grandmother liked, enough so that the grandmother wanted it played at her funeral. On the other hand, DP also notes a generation gap, with he, for example, captivated by a piece by Maseng, which the eighty four year old grandmother found “terrible.”

DP stresses that WLS needs younger people involved in running the synagogue, implying that this is a reason behind the need to change the musical culture. He seems an excellent person to chair this group, as he enjoys all types of liturgical offerings, having been

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<sup>266</sup> <http://www.wls.org.uk/The-Houses>

introduced to new modes of service leading and types of music through the MRJ Conference and the services there, led by Zoe Jacobs. “I welcome anything new whether I like it or not!”

Jacobs was, as mentioned above, the cantor Winer hoped to attract after convincing the congregation that a *chazan* was crucial to their ‘progress’. DP was a party to those discussions. “There is so much added richer music that we can use; it’s a very rich tradition. And so we thought a lot about having Zoe, but there were a number of people not keen on it. It is difficult to isolate the objections. Financial aspects were in question, but it was also about music and style. A lot felt that a cantor was associated with the Orthodox tradition, and people felt that we had come away from the Orthodox tradition of having a cantor, not understanding the Reform aspect to it.”

Although DP loves some of the new music and was one of those driving and supporting change, he does not find the main service objectionable.

I love the evening service, but cannot come often. I love the music. I can relax, wow, end of the week, breathe. And the Shabbat morning service it’s kind of wow, quite awesome, the sanctuary, the sounds, the soloists, it kind of takes my breath away. And I love it, and love listening. It centres me and grounds me. Equally, I could get a different sense from Shabbat Shirah. Shabbat Shirah is lighter, more informal, fun, gives a different perspective to my Friday night, but it doesn’t have the same feelings in it really. When I sit alone in the main service, it’s much more about me and where I am, and I can actually be in the service, concentrate on it, speaking, listening, getting something from that. In Shirah, it is more about closeness to the others of the community. Everyone joins in. I love the kind of Israeli [sic] music, as it is very different and much more modern.

DP offers a vital contribution – he attends both services, and finds value in each; crucially for this thesis, he explains the attraction of the WLS style, the sense of awe and wonder that this type of service can create, even if he retains a humanist perspective on its result, and, more importantly, the difference in degree of privacy, and of focus that this allows. It is possible that non-participation allows for a shift into a private, inner world that a highly participatory service such as Shirah does not. This adds a new dimension, and introduces a note of incongruity. If the generation that is absent, the younger people in their twenties and thirties,

are seeking spiritual experience, it might be argued that a service such as that of WLS is highly conducive to both cultivation of introspection and transcendent experiences, and that a Shirah type service, with nowhere to hide, and which requests universal participation, would be the antithesis. And yet, the Shirah model is the one which is gaining in popularity as a solution to the ‘problem’ of younger people and their lack of attendance.

DP supports those who want more involvement by lay people and the congregation in the music, and the emergent ideas to mix professional singers, a community choir and children. He did not mention goals such as spirituality, but rather, more practical aims.

We will save money, involve members and have kids inspired by music, by creating an environment where people will want to come to Shabbat services. I am not quite sure how, but that is my personal goal: a mix of tradition and modern and a bigger repertoire. I want to see us alternate because there is such a repertoire to draw from, and then get consensus and feedback on what they like, what is okay. Whereas the focus before has always been traditional, and there is nothing wrong with that, but if we are looking to the future, we need to be encouraging our young people. Those are some of the thoughts behind this.

And in this paragraph, we encounter the potpourri of ideas circulating amongst the lay leaders concerning how musical changes will entice people in, particularly the young, and that WLS needs both to cherish its acoustic tradition as well as amplify it via a wide repertoire of music more ‘in the vogue.’

#### **4.5.2 Chair and President**

A former Chair of WLS, IO added her own insights. The audit and cataloguing of the music seems to have been accomplished and EZ has told them that she has found music that they haven’t sung in decades. IO supports the perception that Fixman did not want to change, and was also enlightened about musical possibilities through the intervention of Zoe. She too wants more variety, some new material, and more engagement and participation. “I get nothing at all from the music ‘wafting above me’, because I come from a US background. I want to join in, which is why I like the Shira model.”

IO, unlike DP, alludes to the traditional model of service in which, although not all music is participatory, nonetheless, it is grounded in the congregation and its *shlichei tzibur*.

She hopes as well to create a volunteer choir consisting of Jews, all harnessed towards the spiritual as well as the emotional: “The driving force of this for me, because services are a very important part of what we do, is to have services to get people going, enthused and spiritually nourished. Music does that more than anything else. I also want a bit more educational stuff, to learn a bit about the prayers. We need a background about the prayers and the music. They [the rabbis] need to do more, even stop during the services, and talk about the liturgy and the music.”

Some rabbis do indeed speak through the service. For some this adds a dimension of intellectual understanding and for others, it represents an unwelcome intrusion into the stream of experience. Can a service which is intended to be spiritually nourishing through the auspices of music coexist with a service stressing intellectual content and cognitive understanding. Surely insights from studies in music indicate that such a mix of two disparate and incommensurable goals cannot, in the end, satisfy either objective? Clarity about expectations based on insightful research must precede experimentation, but, this is not, in general, the manner in which the MRJ’s synagogues implement change, in general.

IO confirmed that some opposition to change in the congregation is visceral anathema to that which is perceived as Orthodox and feels that this is due to ignorance “But the Orthodox do that!” and that people confuse *chazan* with cantor. “The term *chazan* is pejorative; they saw this as a step too far. They wanted a balance between solos and choir, and did not want to shift to solo singing. Some felt this would make it sound more ecclesiastical and some that a *chazan* would pressurize them to participate more. Some were very keen, because they felt our music was tired, uninspiring and stuck in a rut. But the one candidate who did get people to join in stimulated a very interesting big debate and there was lots of opposition. So, we engaged a Director of Music who could move into more solo singing.”

This now may be an intermediary step for WLS, the use of a soloist who is Jewish and Jewishly knowledgeable, who is unlike the *chazan* of the traditional world, and whose employ would subvert the implications of that role, that they would necessarily lead a type of service deemed unacceptable there.



IO was the first to speak of the transitional aspect of liturgical music, how it can help move people from one state of being to another, although she does not conclude what the transition is from and to: “Music generally reaches people in a way other elements don’t. It can raise spirits. And not just that. Friday night, the music, the service and the sermon are great transitions. Without the music, it would be colder and much less personal. But the music can also be tedious, repetitious, long-winded and turn people off. And WLS is worried about that.”

She offered a different perspective on the decision-making process at WLS. The wardens form their own committee there, and they, she claims, are the ones in charge of the rituals, with advice and input from the rabbis. She maintains that the wardens can say no to the rabbis, whether or not that particular warden is particularly knowledgeable. It is possible, therefore, that control over the musical decisions is more diffuse and less centred in the professional leadership than the rabbis might believe. This pattern of warden power spreads back to the days of Verrinder, as we have seen.

IO was a supporter of the changes Winer wished to institute, but the leadership was only beginning to spend time with the rabbis to understand their perspectives on change. She does, however doubt that a change in the music will impact on the age and numbers who attend services, and that it may also turn some people off. She had stronger expectations concerning Rabbi Neuberger: “We hope that Julia, who she is and what she stands for, will be an inspiring figure and that more people will turn up.”

This highlights the key issue, that is, how to increase attendances (and membership?) and, although music is the element most discussed and experimented with, WLS has supplemented the search for a musical solution with the appointment of a rabbi who is a prominent media and political figure. If the music will not ensure bursting synagogue services, perhaps a Name will. But in the visits I have made since Neuberger’s appointment, I would not say that there has been a truly appreciable increase in numbers, and, much as she is admired, comments from the community indicate that all four of the rabbis have their acolytes.

## 4.6 The Services

At present, WLS services represent both the most archaic and the most *avant garde* models of music and spirituality in the MRJ. There are regular services, Friday night and Saturday morning; there is Shirah; there are the ‘Combo’ services; there is a family service; there were two *minyanim* defunct soon after I began my research; there is Shirah Chadashah. I have not been able to attend the latter, as it is held irregularly, despite the existence of a written schedule.

### 4.6.1 The Main Service

The congregation drifts in, the voices are lowered, mingling diminishes, and people take their places. The rabbis, informal in the hall before the service, now enter to begin the service, in gowns, and the congregation rises to its feet – a congregation always and all times augmented by visitors, visitors contemplating conversion, visitors from abroad dropping in for the Sabbath, and most commonly, the visitors coming to attend the *b’nai mitzvah* [Bar and Bat mitzvah celebrations] which are at the centre of many *shabbatot*. It is by and large a well-healed group that gathers there, dressed in good quality suits and dresses, quite formal. A number of the women wear *kippot* and *tallitot*. Regulars indicate that those in the pews on any *Shabbat* constitute one third to one half members, with the rest of the fifty to sixty people being visitors. However, with a membership of approximately three thousand seven hundred people, it might well be impossible for anyone to declare who for certain is and is not actually a member.

During the years of field research, WLS has been in flux. When I first began my visits, their standard service had varied little from the services I attended there thirty five years ago and at various points after that, but, I did notice, over the years, the various attempts cited above to modify their musical traditions. Freeman concurred; she stated that the music of WLS has only really changed during the past fifteen years.

This synagogue prides itself on its musical heritage, even described in the novel Ruben Sachs.<sup>267</sup> For all that, its main services were sparsely musical in comparison to other Reform synagogues. These are services which emphasize the spoken word, both instructional and

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<sup>267</sup> Amy Levy, *Ruben Sachs: A Sketch* (London: MacMillan and Co, 1889), 95.

directional verbiage, and the reading of the prayers, singing far less of the service than do other synagogues.

There is little musical variation throughout the service, neither in mood nor relating to the relative differing import of any particular moment. The musical presentation could be described as momentous, grandiloquent; using Schiller's Typology, one could term the prevailing musical mood as Majestic and a hybrid Majestic-Meditative. The organ was sometimes quite deafening, which made it difficult to hear the congregation.<sup>268</sup> Only a few of the congregation join in the singing - I came to know that these were regular attendees.

The insertion of chanting, unaccompanied and led by the rabbis, is reserved for *Chatzi Kaddish*, the *Aleynu*, and sometimes the *Avot u'Gvurot*. There was more participation in those passages than during choral renditions. None of the rabbis had a particularly strong voice, nor could be characterized as a singer, but they had pleasant voices and could carry the tunes.

The repertoire in the main services is still primarily based on their historical music. There was quite a bit of Verrinder, particularly during the Torah service, Salaman, Mombach, Rideout, Waley and a few pieces by Lewandowski. Occasionally there was a new melody; on one particular Friday night, there were three new numbers, interspersed with much that was written by Raphael and Lewandowski. From 2010, the music for the services was recorded on single A4 sheets outlining the name of the pieces to be sung, and the composers. This indicated an awareness of the repertoire, as well as the element of preparation, necessary when working with a flotilla of musicians, but which stymies spontaneity and creative responsiveness. The service might be described as highly regimented and controlled, planned in advance both in the music and in other aspects.

The style of the delivery was heavily episodic – prayer vignettes rather than a flowing prayer line, punctuated by instructions and readings from the *siddur*. During morning services, a small procession of extra readers is brought up to the *bimah* to read a selection, one of a variety of ways in which synagogues involve lay people and de-professionalize the *bimah*;

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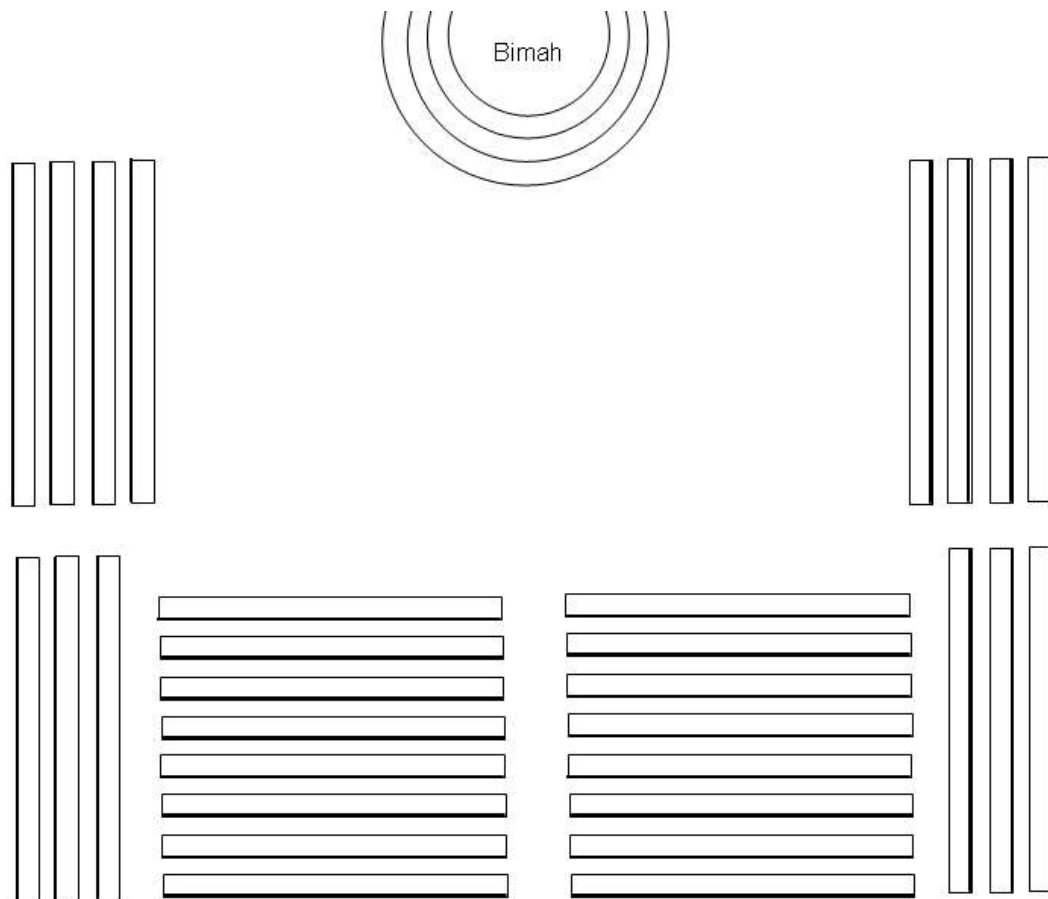
<sup>268</sup> This complaint was also noted during the time of Percy Rideout.

despite this, WLS makes far less use of lay people than do many other synagogues, diminishing the use of Torah honours, and with no tradition of lay readership.

There were wardens in the traditional top hats, sitting off to the side, and, although responsible for the operational side of the service, were not necessarily participating with any more vigour than other members of the synagogue. They seemed to be regarding the congregation through much of the service. The rabbis, too, were seemingly uninvolved in the actual activity of prayer, rarely looking at the *siddur*, but rather, scanning the sanctuary, drinking water – the rabbis did not model awareness of the difference in the sanctity of particular sections of the service, and, even when joining in from the *bimah*, had a tendency to smile and look out at the congregation rather than regard the text. This reinforces the supposition that there is far greater emphasis on community spirit, then on a spiritual community.

There were certain aspects that were out of keeping with the Reform traditions of this country – being seated after the *K'dushah*, which I have never witnessed in another MRJ *shul* on Shabbat, and sitting down during the Torah service whilst the ark remained, nevertheless, open. To an observer, these seem to denote a lack of *kavod*, respect, for some deeply engrained conventions of holiness. And yet, this is a piece of cognitive dissonance, because the sanctuary, a space of beauty and harmony, was designed to facilitate spiritual experiences, and feels truly a holy space.

Most *shabbatot* there are few people in attendance, considering the size of the congregation, even at one Bar mitzvah of the son of a prominent member. People sit spread out - one could feel isolated, or could achieve solitude, in the midst of such a community, or, upon becoming more acquainted with people, choose to sit in closer proximity with acquaintances and friends. The lay-out of the space lends itself to the type of music performed there. Building, music, and demeanour of the leadership support this as a synagogue of dignified and splendid decorum and nobly-presented music. The fixed seats mark the space out as a 'sanctuary;' other activities on separate occasions can be disconcertingly subverting. A convert I was teaching was deeply disturbed during a klezmer concert held in the sanctuary – formerly a Catholic, the idea of spatial sacrality was ingrained. Immobile stalls are, however, atypical.



Music is not the only regulated aspect of the service; there is little or no spontaneity from the pulpit. I witnessed very few unscripted moments; one, during an address to the Bar mitzvah by Winer, another in the addition of readings and welcome to visiting rabbis by both Freeman and Neuberger. WLS's sense of propriety seems not to allow such casual interjections.

However, there transpire during the services some quite surprising instances of casual treatment of Jewish tradition, as in the above-mentioned manner in which the ark is left open throughout the Torah service. This lack of veneration for various Jewish conventions is further expressed in the manner in which various prayers are skipped over, with what might be seen as a lack of reverence for *matbeah hatefilah*; music once composed to fit the older prayer book is now maintained, despite changes brought in by the new prayerbook. One interesting example is the continuation of the custom of the addition of 'Nora' to the Torah service, despite this being a festival insertion which was deleted from the new *Shabbat* service. This impression has been further enhanced by the new *siddur* for Friday night which has been compiled and published under Neuberger's auspices, and which has excised some of

the traditional passages that were included in the new prayerbook. Like FRS, but unlike Sinai, there is less emphasis on the idea of the integrity of the order of service.

There is variation in the amount of chanting and rabbinically-led recitation, latitude given for the predilection of that week's rabbis, although the chanting is of passages that would otherwise be read, and not of the standard set of sung pieces. It does not replace anything. The congregation joins in more keenly with the chanting than with the choral pieces, but the choir adds to the chanting: after quite full participation in the Biblical trope recitative of the *Shema* and *V'ahavta*, done to the Eastern European modes universally used in North America but not in the UK, the choir belted out the normally quiet response of '*Baruch Shem*;' lately, they have begun to join *sotto voce* and *a capella*, with all the chanting. There is such a proliferation and confusion of styles at play, that it is difficult to grasp the musical centre of the service.

The chanting is not only an aid to participation; it is, as Neuberger perhaps feared, an attempt to add an air of authenticity to the proceedings. SF confirms this: "It was an excellent idea, exciting, this connecting to the tradition. And it encourages participation." The latter is indeed true - more people join in the chanted portions than the choral pieces (and, as noted, the read passages as well). This is partly because a single voice can encourage participation, particularly when it is a pleasant, but 'average' voice, not the well-trained beautiful voices of the professional singers; this is an invitation to shift from appreciatory to participatory and it is successful.

The service is well-regulated and runs smoothly, due to the presence both of wardens and rotating Shabbat *gabbais* [those who help during the service to ensure things run smoothly and are correctly executed]. One of the wardens is a woman, dressed in a modest brown suit and with a brown top hat. They do not seem to function as praying role models. Most synagogues offer *mitzvot* after the service commences, and then the wardens have a visible presence, but in this stage-managed service, last minute offers do not seem to exist. I am not offered anything, despite being a high status guest, and despite the fact that one is meant to offer honours to visitors. It is only with the advent of the current senior rabbi, who, prior to the service saw me and another visiting rabbi, and offered us both readings.

It is noteworthy that there is a certain neglect of the *siddur*. The disaffected do not open it,

but as well, rarely do the rabbis and the wardens. Its use is confined to a few serious participants and those who are not as familiar with the liturgy.

The music of the services is dominated by the organ. Pieces often end on the octave above the tonic; there are many grand chords, with dynamics alternating between very loud and quite soft, adding dramatic effect. There is little rhythmic sense to the music. It is, as everyone interviewed agreed, “beautiful.” Many in WLS are proud of its musical heritage, although revolution was always in the air during the years of observations.

There is a different valence, perhaps because a different set of needs and expectations, between Friday night and *Shabbat* morning. Very often, I noticed some people sitting with eyes shut during some of the pieces, their demeanours suggesting that they found the presentation calming and meditative. There are also a few who join voice with all choral compositions and not just with the rabbi, however, it is fair to say that the majority of the people exhibit few signs of either inner contemplation or outer participation.

#### **4.6.2 Shirah**

In his desire to bring the taste of BJ to London, Winer encouraged the associate rabbis to develop and lead alternative services. Shabbat Shirah, the fortnightly alternative Shabbat evening service, was begun by Rabbi Michael Farbman. Winer felt that the sanctuary had been “built for transcendence, but that it should be a place for people to experience immanence” and therefore, Shabbat Shirah was to take place in the sanctuary itself, later, after the regular Friday evening service.

Rabbi Malcolm Cohen, who succeeded Farbman as assistant rabbi and leader of Shabbat Shirah remarked that the original aim of the service was to offer an alternative for those who could not abide the main service; however, he was not certain if people had actually been clamouring for such an alternative. He ascribed much of the success of Shirah to the fact that Farbman was warm and welcoming – and that he may have been the first WLS rabbi capable of leading such an alternative.

Farbman had a background in RSY-Netzer<sup>269</sup>, so when Cohen assumed responsibility he found it “a bit cheesy and American, hit and miss.” Cohen had two seminal influences. One was the TBJ experience, and the other was the Reform Chavurah, run together with Rabbi Dr. Deborah Kahn-Harris,<sup>270</sup> which was essentially a Carlebach service with the traditional *Kabbalat Shabbat* structure.

However, when looking for a musical style for Shirah, he engaged two friends who were professional musicians with the group Los Desterrados to “create a Friday night service we would love going to. I’m not a musical person, so I ask, what do I like, what will others like, what will get the crowd going, draw them in.” He wanted different types of music, not just the usual American folk music.

The two musicians, in keeping with their roots in Los Desterrados, incorporated Sephardi music into their service. Cohen was pleased. “I liked the music of Los Desterrados. It was relatively new in the Jewish world, kind of cool, a different sound, and it works well in WLS given its history. I was sure no one else was doing that in the country.”

This was a unique opportunity to interview someone who was creating a new model of service intended to attract a new constituency to WLS. One hears again that a, the, crucial aspect in this endeavour was to encourage people to attend services, that music is the key, and that this would be of most particular interest to the younger people.

Cohen echoed what others were saying, about the deep connection between music and spirituality and efficaciousness in prayer: “The music we chose had a warm, spiritual sound to it. For me, spiritual is when everyone feels called to join in...as opposed to performers performing or the main service which disenfranchises people. Spiritual can also mean exotic, other-worldly. Passionate music, with oomph, power. One reason we got away from the

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<sup>269</sup> Reform Synagogue Youth, the youth section of the MRJ. Farbman, although originally Russian, had spent time in Jewish camps, using the RSY songbook, which contained secular folk and pop songs and Israeli music, as well as the popular ‘new’ American liturgical music of Debbie Friedman et al.

<sup>270</sup> Principal of Leo Baeck College.



American folk music is that it sounds like pop music, but it is not as passionate or fiery in the worship setting.”

Cohen had spent time at Hebrew Union College, the American Reform Rabbinical and Cantorial School, and had been taught by cantors about the use and purpose of liturgical music. This explains much about his deep convictions and thoughtfulness concerning music and liturgy – unlike those who only studied at Leo Baeck College, he was exposed to a College which engaged Cantors to employ their knowledge and expertise in the training of their rabbinical colleagues. It is from this background that he was able to articulate that “music gives life to the words and helps the *kavanah*, that is sometimes transports people out of their regular existence to a spiritual place, that it can be a vehicle for expressing the emotions from the past week or internal narratives, giving voice to these things.”

Cohen added two lay musicians from the synagogue to the team. One of the decisions they made was to limit the introduction of new music, because they believed there would be a risk of alienating people. Over time, Shirah came to have a standardized musical identity and a core of stock melodies that the team added to over time so as to “keep it fresh”. During the years that I visited, it was clear that this service had also settled into its own musical habits, and, although there is more singing in Shirah and much more participation, later rabbis worried that Shirah was developing its own musical orthodoxies.

When asked if Shirah had been successful, Cohen replied that it had attracted a range of ages, and was a particular draw for people in their twenties and thirties, bringing in some sixty people each night. Although he maintained that you would not have seen these people in the main service, this perception was not always accurate. There were some who attended both services, including the Shirah violinist Maurice Mayer, and there was a spread of ages in both services, even if younger people predominated at Shabbat Shirah. Some attendees privately expressed to me their additional intention for attending was to meet someone, facilitated by going to a restaurant together after the service. In striking contrast to a comparable Orthodox experience, the Saatchi Synagogue, whereas WLS encourages people to go out to restaurants after the services, Saatchi provides the meal at the synagogue. This supports the contention that attendance at services is the primary value of the synagogue, followed by informal congregational connection, but that the rabbis do not see their role as encouraging wider Shabbat, or other Jewish, observances.

As the leadership changed hands, the message that Shirah was for younger people became more forceful, although one cross-over observer and I attended a dinner one night. As there was no *Kiddush* or *Motzi*, nor any *z'mirot* or *bensching* [grace after meals], it was no different from any other social outing such a group would make.

### **4.6.3 Rabbi Debbie Young-Somers**

Young-Somers was with Shirah since Cohen left in 2009, working first with Danny Burke and the musicians Cohen assembled, and then with the new assistant Rabbi, David Mitchell. She is no longer a rabbi at WLS, and had no direct input into musical change, but deserves a brief mention. When interviewed, she spoke of the heyday of Shirah, when it attracted two hundred people, as opposed to the sixty who were the pillars of the main service; during my visits, Shirah and the main service both attracted approximately sixty people each. What has never been clear is how many of the regulars in the main service are members, as opposed to the visitors one often encounters at Shirah.

Music is the main *raison d'être* of Shirah. She knows this “because of how people’s bodies and mouths respond; they are joining in and singing. If you don’t like the music, you wouldn’t come to Shirah.” When I asked if that were not also the case for the main service, she replied that some actually say they come for the sermons, which they do not deliver at Shirah. It surprises her that people love sermons, and even mention favourites. Young-Somers needed to renew Shirah, as there were adverse comments during Burke’s era that he, not a confident singer, allowed rabbinical chat to supplant the music. One interviewee stated that they did not attend Shirah for study sessions and explanations, but for music, and, that the balance was no longer satisfying to them during Burke’s days. Services need to find their focus, whether emphasizing the affective or the cognitive, and adhere to their prime emphasis, otherwise they risk a kind of confusion of genres, possibly pleasing no one.

### **4.6.4 Shirah Musicians**

#### **4.6.4.1 Violinist Morris Meyer**

Meyer came originally from an Iraqi Jewish family and was raised an Orthodox Jew in various countries. When he arrived in the UK, he married a singer who was in the choir under

Mark Raphael. Meyer was the first to mention the Music Committee, which was in his view the final arbiter of what music was to be sung. He felt that this was a unique situation.

Meyer commented that the music was very different at WLS, except for *Ein Keloheinu* and a couple of pieces during Yom Kippur. “The music became a tradition they came to enjoy, but not so much to join in. There wasn’t enthusiasm, where people threw themselves into the music; it was very formal, more like a cathedral, a performance. The people liked it, got used to it and liked to keep it that way.”

He too mentions the last ten years as pivotal in the changing culture of WLS. “It has been coming in fast and proper, the new music. It brings more participation when they join and sing. The music helps the prayer. You go into it, you feel it, the participation is warmer and more personal, not just sitting like a concert watching something.” When I asked what difference it would make to WLS to change the music, he laughed. “It would bring passionate involvement in the service, in prayer, not sedate and cool as it is now.” Meyer echoes Cohen, who was also searching for something passionate, a quality of emotional engagement that the early Reformers had wished to obliterate.

I asked him why he attends both types of evening service. Partly, and this highlights the idea that Shabbat is a spatial concept, it is because he is alone and comes to have a Sabbath connection. As for playing during Shirah, he said that he had been playing *klezmer* for some years and “when I play that kind of music on the violin, I feel I am praying.”

We discussed the idea that music and dance are intimately connected, and although he has seen dancing during services elsewhere, he doesn’t believe it will happen here as it is still a very formal place. But he regards Shirah as a place for people to grow with, “for it to grow on them” and therefore, as an on-going development. He is of the opinion that musical traditions are a habit, whether in the Orthodox world or in WLS, and mentions the particular pull of the melodies one hears in childhood are the tunes that grow on you and that you grow with. Meyer’s reflection about the imprinting of melodies is an important one which arises again and again in the ethnography.

#### **4.6.4.2 Drummer Mark Greenfield**

The heart of Shirah has been the two musicians from Los Desterrados. One of them, Mark Greenfield, the drummer, heard some of the main service before he became involved in Shirah,<sup>271</sup> and added his voice to those who believed prayer needed to be participatory and that it wasn't in the main service. His musical influences were Reform; he grew up in Wembley Progressive Synagogue, a small congregation that once existed and held services in a small room.

For Greenfield, spirituality is strongly bonded to participation: "Participation is very crucial to me to connect with a spirituality. I like singing with friends, I am in a couple of bands, and the listening, the hearing, the participation, is a massive part of spirituality for me. My dominant prayer experience is through singing."

We discussed the different ways in which people derive spiritual nourishment through music. He understands that people with a different upbringing find the main service with "well-rehearsed, lovely melodies wafting over them and the organ, a powerful instrument..." can induce spiritual feelings, as can reading the prayers.

Greenfield met Cohen when the latter led alternative services at other synagogues and also attended the Reform Chavurah mentioned above as well as some early iterations of Shirah. He was attracted to Shirah by the earlier use of a piano, which was novel, and said it had a "nice *kavanah*, a good vibe." However, "the musicians were out in the front, and they and the piano were distractions. It felt like an evening concert. It was sweet, the music was sensitive and the style was laid back. You could see that these were rehearsed musicians providing the service, although we were really encouraged to participate. But it was still formal, presented to us."

When he was invited to help shape the music of Shirah with the advent of Cohen's leadership, he felt that his sets of percussive instruments could lend a Sephardi and Judeo-Arabic feel that might work well with the design, early history, and aesthetics of WLS. "I was in a band, so understood about arrangements and pacing and dynamics, light and shade, etc. Malcolm came up with the ideas and Gideon [Lyons, another member of Los Desterrados]

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<sup>271</sup> Bowers-Broadbent has not attended Shirah.

had attended songleader conventions in the USA and had songs and new tunes. It was dynamic and refreshing.”

Greenfield reinforces what Winer had mentioned, that much of the success of Shirah in those years was attributable to Cohen and the following he developed. In its day, although numbers fluctuated between fifty and one hundred and twenty, it was a congregation of new parents, conversion students, young adults, transient guests, and musically-inclined families, providing a place for these groups to pray. Younger teens did not attend as the service ended at eight-thirty. He also said that there were visiting students, and many single people, and that there was an implicit matchmaking agenda.

In the time just after Cohen departed, fewer attended, although again, that fluctuated. Burke, one of the two new Shirah leaders was not a confident singer, although Young-Somers was; accordingly, there were adverse remarks that talking was supplanting the music. And in what Greenfield described about working with non-musical rabbis, we see clearly the issue with how music is held and led in the Reform movement. As noted in the overview of music in the synagogues of the movement, most of the music is in the hands of the rabbis and yet, LBC does not stipulate as one of its entrance requirements that one needs to be musical, and have a pleasant and commanding singing voice, nor had there been, until very recently, any attempt to work with the students on this central aspect of their work. Rabbis are often hired on the basis of whether or not the search committee and the members polled like the services that the candidate leads. And although there are many aspects to that service leadership, and the ability to sing may or may not figure prominently in a decision, it is certainly viewed, increasingly, as the single most important aspect of attractive and spiritually engaging service leading.

Greenfield echoed many others when he said that

the purpose of a service is to get people to connect with their spirituality and music is a constituent part of that process. It can bring people in, to connect to their congregation, fellow congregants, to the spiritual place and to the Jewish people. The inheritance of the tune, the communal aspect of singing together, bouncing off each other is the purest form of community, judgment free; if given an opportunity to join in it can be a joyous, challenging and uplifting moment. Music can lubricate the

spiritual or catalyse the spiritual moment. In the singing and in the harmonizing I come closest to getting away from myself.

He also mentioned absence of sound, an observation which is echoed in certain sectors at FRS. Greenfield explained that silence and music were the easiest ways to find spiritual fulfilment in the formal space of a synagogue, and regretted in passing that there was less silence after Cohen left. Use of silence was also mentioned by one of the congregants whom I interviewed [see below].

Again and again we find that, of the various components of a service, the words, music, silence (absence of the first two), murmurs, fellowship, space... of all of these component pieces, music carries the burden and honour of being the salient factor in whether or not a service is meaningful to people, in fact, as to whether or not sacrality is achieved.

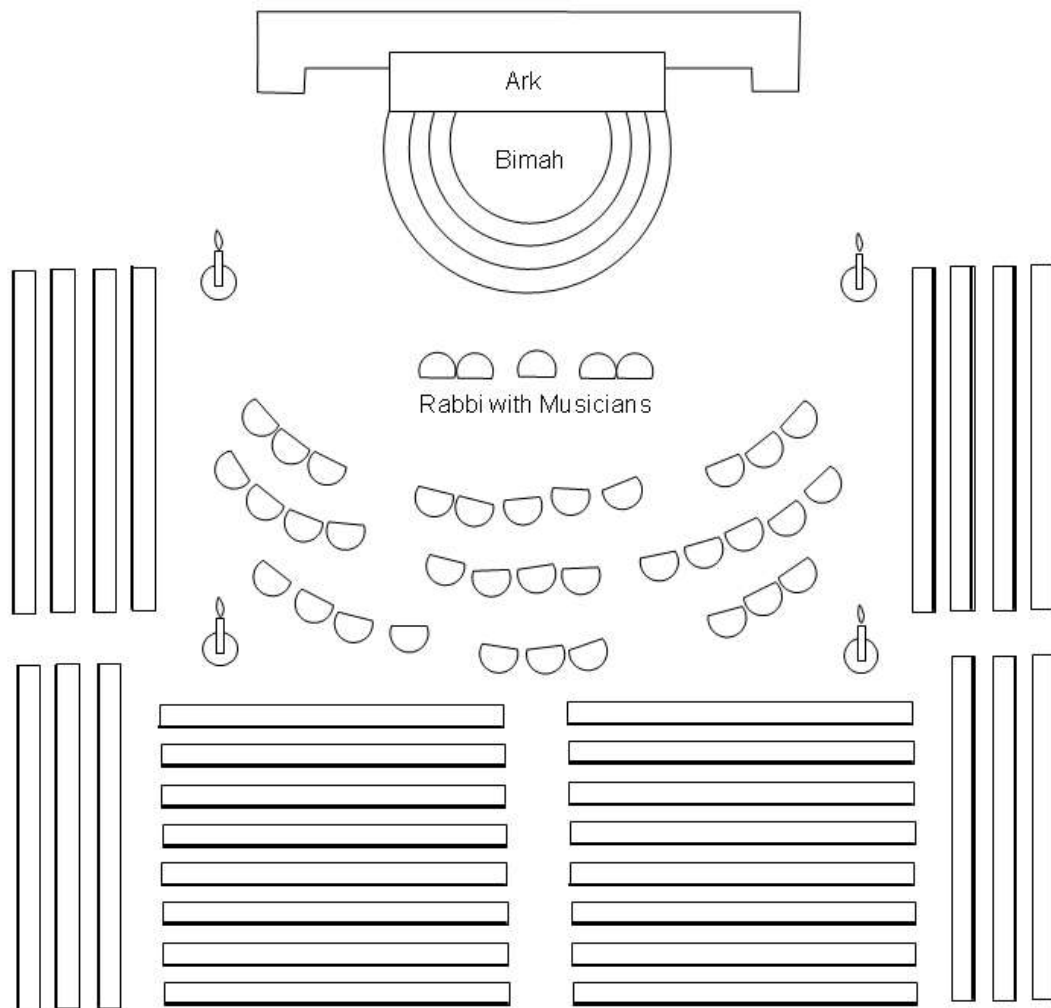
The team which made the musical decisions at Shirah was a professional team and Greenfield and Lyons (and later Drew Salida, also of Los Desterrados) laid claim to some Jewish musical expertise as well, although not as *chazanim* and without the wider Jewish liturgical musical experiences of Fixman. They were, however, in a more dynamic relationship with music, congregation, and the service than was Fixman, who regarded the music as an atomized element creating its own meaning independent of the words. Greenfield said that they considered “the needs of the community, what they enjoy, tunes that seem to have the right vibe, as well as the dynamic of the service, and its ebb and flow. The words would sometimes determine the music. And, we tried to get a bit of life, to choose or omit music, in order to pep people up. Much was also based on the rabbis’ interests.”

Although there were differences of opinion about how often to change a melody, they continue introducing new melodies, and regard Shirah as “a constantly developing alternative.” They attempt to be responsive and informal, qualities missing in the decision-making processes of the main service. Again, the idea of responsiveness was highlighted by one of the congregational interviewees.

Spontaneous or ‘rogue’ harmonization is something I took particular note of in a service. It signifies both the positive indicators of comfort, familiarity and playfulness, some neutral aspects demonstrating musical knowledge and possibly some contentious ones about

possession, disrupting the holistic atmosphere, and appropriacy of the moment. Greenfield sees it as a positive thing, something that cannot occur in the main service (and indeed, does not), but which is encouraged at Shirah.

The seating pattern for Shirah further reflects the alteration in patterns of authority and community that the rabbis wish to engender. For Shirah, all is brought down from the *bimah*, a word signifying elevation, but in traditional synagogues generally not the purview of the clergy, until they join those reading the Torah. This is another result of the S2K project – the increasing stress on models of immanence rather than transcendence, as mentioned by Winer. Both FRS and Sinai employ that model, of the *shatz* leading on the level of the congregation, with the *bimah* reserved for the Torah reading (or larger, more formal services, such as a *Bar/Bat mitzvah*). Shirah had to engage in the further stage of eradicating ‘sacred space’ which divides the *bimah* from the first rows of seats. Thus, for Shirah, the rabbi and musician’s chairs are placed at the base of the *bimah*, with concentric half circles of chairs facing them and to some extent each other, although many do sit in the pews as well.



Greenfield noted that those who sit at the front will harmonize but others do not, and indeed, all evidence of spontaneous behaviour, bodily movement, was marked in the inner rows, but not in the outer rows and pews. Their ideal model of service, the TBJ exemplar, is one in which the congregation dances and is often on their feet and moving, but any movement noted at visits to Shirah was limited to that which could be done whilst seated, a toe tapping, a sway in time of the body, and some light clapping. Cultural differences in embodiment might be in operation.

Greenfield made an important observation in which he stated that “the culture at WLS is to lead and that is the case even in Shirah. As inclusive as we are, we still lead,” a viewpoint expressed as well by Young-Somers. It is not clear what alternative there is to leading, unless



it were to be a Quaker style model in which various individuals come up and propose a song. In my own work in much smaller groups, I do offer the congregation the opportunity to choose a melody here and there, and have deferred to them in the matter of certain ‘*misinai*’<sup>272</sup> melodies of their own, and so, his question may be better formulated as ‘what input does the congregation have in real time to the music and manner of the service.’ Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Shirah seems to have become a minor version of the main service, that is, a polished and lovely professional musical presentation.

#### 4.6.5 Other Alternative Services

There have been other attempts at alternative services at WLS. Young-Somers led a service called Gateway, which was intended to be a learner’s service. “There were not too many new tunes, because we spent time on one section to study and learn it. I did choose to sing *Dror Yikra* to Sloop John B<sup>273</sup>, because the melody would be easily recognized and it would encourage participation.” The other alternative was a more traditional service, called Haminyan, which was chanted in Hebrew, and included more prayers. Both these services had fallen by the wayside.

Shirah Chadashah was intended to replace Haminyan to some extent, and began at the end of January, 2013, as a trial. As WLS continues to discuss the Shabbat services, Shirah is also under discussion. Freeman says that the cost of the musicians is very high for a service that now only attracts some sixty people. She believes that some of its earlier success was too tied up with personality cults around the figures of Faberman and Cohen, and maybe not as much to the musical alternative it represents. The last Shirah I visited had only twenty five in attendance, a third fewer than the main service that night. There was a little cross-visitation, but three young people who had clearly evinced interest in the main service and had stayed on for Shirah, left fairly near the beginning. I could not say whether it was the service or a prior engagement that caused them to depart.

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<sup>272</sup> ‘From Sinai’ – a category of songs that are considered to be ancient but actually, stem from Medieval Germany and may be contrafacta. This expression is used colloquially to denote music that is revered and unalterable.

<sup>273</sup> Song popularized by The Beach Boys in the 1960s.

Alternative services in the movement tend to a few types. One is those intended for young children. FRS holds one of these early on some Friday evenings, and WLS on a Shabbat morning; both refer to Tots in their name. The next type is a family service. WLS has one on a *Shabbat* morning; as with the tots' service, these are monthly services, with the intention, according to Mitchell, that these would take place three times a year in the main sanctuary, supplanting the main service. A service entitled 'family' is meant to indicate a different kind of experience than that of a children's service. The latter would be a signal that the service would be geared to the very young, whereas a family service tends to contain material for both younger and older people, and to function as an informal substitute for the more formal weekly services.

FRS now holds all of their family services in the main sanctuary, which is to make a claim about the importance of the family experience and the right of families to occupy the main space on the primary day for congregating. Location of alternatives indicates the relative importance and status of the group these involve, either in actuality or by desire. It will signal a decrease in decorum, as children will be given the right to make noise and otherwise disrupt the dignity normally expected. The experiments with introducing the Shirah music into the main service, and the gainsaying of possession of the sanctuary to the family service, indicate in a concrete manner that WLS wishes the music and the [younger] demographic to begin to own the space. Additionally, calling a service 'family' safely allows for the introduction of modern Jewish music and even songs in English.<sup>274</sup>

There are some synagogues which maintain a more traditional alternative, that is, Hebrew, chanting and more of the prayers, but these do not seem to be popular. Participating in a traditional service requires not just knowledgeable *ba'alei t'filah* but also a knowledgeable congregation. Other alternatives such as the Library Minyan at Sinai<sup>275</sup> and FRS's

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<sup>274</sup> It was at a monthly family service at the Newcastle synagogue that I introduced the music of Friedman, Klepper and others, including some singing in English, allowed for percussive instruments to be played, encouraged dancing and other movement, substituted a story for a discussion, and ended the whole in one hour. It had fervent admirers amongst many of those without children, but equally fervent detractors who would never attend such a 'chaotic,' undignified service. It was not, however, an experience of prayerfulness; the emphasis was more on demonstrating that synagogue is a 'fun' place to be.

<sup>275</sup> Now defunct.

alternatives cater to groups who wish greater participation and for study and discussion to be major components. FRS also sees its alternatives as offering more spiritual content. In many cases, these other services have not been maintained, whether lay or professionally led, which is striking, given that these were all intended to transform the service. It seems that, in general, the main sanctuary service is the default position, whether because it is the preferred option, or because it has the *hechsher* [Imprimatur of approval] because it is the main service. And this is the case both at WLS, with its highly formal service, and FRS, with its highly musical, varied, and cantor-led services.

## **4.7 Reception and Rejection – The Congregation**

### **4.7.1 Introduction**

Buried deeper below the strata of lay and professional leaders involved in the music and liturgical direction of WLS, is the community. As will have become apparent, although WLS has a very large membership, its central London position means that it attracts visitors and tourists, as well as guests at the many special occasions. I therefore interviewed people whom I could identify as members and regulars. However, this does not mean that we need to discount the feelings of the leaders, rabbinic and lay, for they will also be struggling to find meaning in the service as practicing Jews, at the same time as leading. Neuberger said of this, “When officiating, it is jolly hard to have any experience at all. One is more like a stage manager, projecting so that others have the experience.” In a highly regulated pre-organized service, the rabbis at WLS have many opportunities to function as participants themselves, and to reflect on their reactions, as we saw with Mitchell. This will become more apparent when comparing their role to the ones of the rabbis at FRS and, in particular, at Sinai Synagogue. The distance that the rabbis have from the music-making during the actual service means that the WLS rabbis feel perhaps more the impact of various styles in a way that rabbis who are in total control of the music do not. The rabbis are, in this model, almost as much acted upon by the music as the congregants.

### **4.7.2 The Congregation**

Opinions about the services are mixed. Within every synagogue there are different shades of service attendee. One is the Regular – ‘A Jew should be in *shul* on *shabbos*.’ Another is the

Irregular Regular, who comes regularly, but randomly, and will allow other arrangements to intervene. Then there is the Regular Irregular. One sees this person occasionally, as he/she is not a once a year Jew. That constitutes another category, the Occasional Jew, who attends for the High Holidays, and *simchas*. And then there is the true Irregular, who visits every so often, but thwarts even the expectation of Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur attendance.

These somewhat whimsical categories delineate the differences between those whose diaries are intentionally free so that they attend services on Shabbat, with occasional holiday breaks or days off at home, versus those who do not prioritize Shabbat observance, and will create diary dates or engage in other activities, but still sometimes for various reasons on a free Saturday, will pop into synagogue services. Given the difficulties of ascertaining the make-up of the congregation, I was able formally to interview seven congregants, two of whom only attend Shirah, one of whom attends both, one of whom no longer attends, and the others, who attend the main service only. In addition, I had informal conversations with many participants, asking simple questions about one or another particular issue.

The backgrounds of these individuals are also of interest. Three had had Orthodox background, and of those, one had nevertheless a long association with Reform and Liberal services, whilst the other two had first encountered Reform at WLS. One was a couple, one of who grew up in the Reform and the other with no synagogue attendance in childhood. One was from Eastern Europe and had spent time in various synagogues in Europe. And two were converts, one originally Catholic and the other originally Salvation Army.

One of them, TA came from an Ashkenazi background, whose family went to a *shtibl* in the East End. She has a different perspective on the nature of *chazan*-led services than many of the others at WLS who resisted the idea: “There were no choirs as such in my day. There was always a *chazan* – we don’t have one, unfortunately - and because there was a *chazan*, there was great participation. He was a leader and would stir everybody into singing.” TA joined WLS fifteen years earlier, after a hiatus in observance, and notes the differences both in participation and in religious passion: “This is totally different music from my childhood music. Then they sang with fervour, the belief in what they were singing. Not just the words, it was the belief in what they were singing that made it so good. There is a difference in belief here, oh yes, not the fervour, even in the Orthodox world, that those who came from Russia

and Poland and founded *shtibls*. People come to synagogue today in quite a subdued manner.”

That isn’t to say that she doesn’t appreciate the effect. “I find the music here, I’m looking for the right word, very uplifting. Sidney is a wonderful choir master. His knowledge of music is immense and he knows the congregation. The music he puts to the choir is truly wonderful.”

I choose to interview TA because she is there every Shabbat, eyes closed, singing., and wishes others would join in with her: “The problem is that people are a little afraid to raise their voices to join in the singing. My voice is one of the ones to be heard, and one or two others join in. I was shyer at first, but today I partake, I want to partake, in the speaking, singing and actions. Others don’t. Okay, people who come for special occasions and are not *au fait* won’t join in, but even members don’t. They are a little bit shy.”

TA is what one might term a Reform ecstatic; she loses herself in the music and in the prayers themselves. “I almost forget that there are others around me. And I sing up. I sing loudly and pray loudly in English and Hebrew. I am not a fluid reader, but at the same time, I read reasonably well.”

We speak about the function of music, but for her, its paramount importance is the opportunity for involvement, and she returns again and again to the congregation and its passivity. “Music is enormously important, because it really gives people the opportunity to take part in the service and that is the important thing. Music helps people to lose themselves a little and to be involved, rather than be just onlookers. Even when I go occasionally to an Orthodox *shul* where there is a *chazan* and there the congregation rely on him rather than joining and singing themselves. I like to join and sing with the choir, to become part of the choir.”

This has not always been well-received. “Someone at a Bar mitzvah once said, ‘Do you mind not singing so loudly?’ I was shocked. Maybe people think you are being a bit forward, encroaching on the service or something like that.” This is an interesting observation, returning us to the discussion about whose service it is, who owns the space and the moment. TA claims ownership in a manner that most do not, because she both embraces the style and, as she put it, loses herself in it. This is most likely due to the nature of her Jewish

background, East End, eastern European, and from the world of the *shtetlach*, all of which inculcated in her a far different sense of the nature of a religious service and an ease with emotional expression, and the Jewish legitimacy thereof. There is a subtext here, demarcating a boundary, as in the following anecdote” “...a congregant was jestingly silenced by another during services when the former sang along with the cantor during a traditional liturgical passage: “Shhh!” said her friend. “You can’t do that here. It’s too Jewish.”<sup>276</sup>

TA has never attended Shirah, because he doesn’t feel the drums and guitars would suit her, and she is more interested in the prominence of the vocal than “the noise behind.” She is indifferent to musical change. “There are times when Sidney does change the music, and I try to join in. It may become a little boring to sing the same tune to the same words week in and week out, but it is more settled to have music you know so you can let yourself go and join in.” She does not feel that the choral music of the main service is at all difficult for people, and perhaps that anyway it would not matter, for “You don’t have to be a great tenor or soprano, just lift up the voice.”

Certain pieces of new music, like the Klepper *Mah Tov*, she finds more difficult, but realizes that repetition would enable her to “get the hang of it.” However, as with DP’s mother, the new *V’al Kulam* melody has become a musical highlight. “It’s not only the music, but the words behind the music and how the music is applied to the passage that we are reading. That is the whole secret of it. I come to pray. It’s got to have some meaning, but if the whole of it would be musical, that would be fine with me.” She senses nuances in the service, passages that are joyful, and those that are less so. Sometimes different voices might express this better. Hers is a sort of schemata similar to Schiller’s, and is equally episodic in conception.

Despite her desire to have a *chazan* who could lead proper chanting so that “we would throw our arms in the air” she still desires to retain the choir fairly much as is. She loves the solemnity of the main service and contrasts it favourably to a gospel service, which she feels would not be solemn enough.

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<sup>276</sup> Frida Kerner Furman, “Synagogue life among Reform Jews,” in *The Life of Judaism*, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 60.

In sharp contrast, IE, one of the converts, not only came from a Salvation Army background, but was a brass player, later a choirmaster and a lay preacher. In fact, he found the Sally Army himself as a youth, because “it was Christian, religious, good fun, and I enjoyed the singing.”

He has trenchant observations about the nature of the music and emotionalism in the main service. “The rabbis here are not good at emotional engineering. There is no evidence of ability to move a congregation.”

Salvation Army services stemmed from the 19th century American evangelical world, perhaps as far removed from the staid and stately world of Bevis Marks and WLS as could possibly be. And although the evangelical model had no apparent influence on early American Reform services, it certainly has had an impact on some alternative Jewish services, as an exemplar of a religious arena in which emotional expression takes primary place.

He explained the model:

You need to know your congregation. Then you need to engineer the music, because what you are about doing is getting everyone excited and position, then starting to question them. There would be a hymn sandwich – hymn, prayer, hymn – and readings interspersed, not a liturgical service, but everyone knew the format. It was all about congregational singing. The hymns and choruses were very carefully chosen to mould the service and get the desired result. We also focused on the wording. The character of the songs would be very different, first stirring, lifting the emotions, having a good sing, then a challenge with the sermon, then quiet thoughts, and then soft choruses sung, and questioning. We would ask, ‘Are these wonderful words really about you? Have you not failed?’

His background was fascinating, because it most approximated a more traditional sense of flow and direction, even in its episodity, and again, offers a contrast to the Schiller Typology, which begins more and more to feel like a clever use of M words, but one which prevents us from understanding the real shape of both the sections and of the individual components of a Shabbat service. “Services were carefully constructed and the person who had that task had

an end in mind, about belief, about the inner person, and influencing the beliefs of the people and bringing them to acceptance that all that matters is your reliance on the Lord.”

IE has been at WLS for some ten to twelve years. He found the melodies difficult and not easily sing-able, and in fact, very dated. He had high hopes, when we first spoke, that the new director would make the music and the service more accessible. He feels that the main service is “about making the older congregation, who grew up with these pieces and love them, feel comfortable. Even when they are not singing, they mouth the words. It is tradition. Folk come to hear, if not always the same melodies, then a family of melodies that they are comfortable with.”

Because he is less attracted to what he sees as a body of music used for decades, sung without conviction, he mostly attends Shirah now on a Friday night; the choice was clearly a musical one and Shirah offers the closest prototype to those aspects of his former Salvation Army services he found meaningful: “I found Shirah a way in, near enough to my former experience to be very comfortable and to help me being to sing the Hebrew. I’m selfish. I am trying to reflect on what I am singing. Once I knew enough Hebrew, I moved from rote singing of strange and wonderful sounds to beginning to understand the words.” He has found that what happens in Shirah supports his participation. “In the main service, I can feel like I am singing to myself.” He claims that his cohorts, those who have and are going through the conversion programme known as J-Prep, are the ones who sing most readily, because they are in the process of learning the language and then the tunes. Both he and TA emphasized communal singing, or rather, the support they needed from neighbouring pray-ers who might be equally involved in the service.

J-Prep was one group that WLS felt would be most invested in Shirah, and, although one observes members of the conversion class at Shirah, one also finds them in the main service as well. There is far better attendance at Friday night services than at Shabbat morning services amongst this group, and it might be that for some, an earlier service is much more amenable than the late service, even if they might enjoy the format of the latter more. It is also possible that, given that a fairly high proportion of converts pass through WLS and will not become involved in the life of the synagogue, the music of the service does not really matter at all. For a great number, service attendance is a box to tick on the way to the Beth Din and thence the *chuppah*[marriage canopy]; for others, WLS is a convenient locale for



people who will, otherwise, move on to other places and other countries. WLS is trying to engage a group who, given their life situations, may not be in a position to commit themselves to a synagogue, and are immune to musical change.

IE queried what he felt was an inappropriate matching of words and music, which led him “to believe, to question, the general congregation. Do they know the words, especially the older members, do they know what they are singing, or do they learn by rote? The tunes are so traditional that no one is thinking any of that through. They just want to sing the traditional songs as well as possible, the right words and the right piece at the right place.” ” He mentioned the Torah service, in particular, where he felt that not enough time was taken over the opening, and that the music does not support the words, which are somewhat “military and robust.”

IE wants the music to shape the spiritual experience, in much the same way as the Salvation Army music. In fact, his major criticism is that “I get no feeling of them trying to manipulate my feelings.” He is very critical of the choir, perceiving no emotional feeling in what they produce, the registers too high, “the voice production very operatic, the whole more like a cathedral. Does this choir want me to join in with them? Even behind the screen, that attitude comes forward.” He notes that he does increase his attempts to participate when invited to, as do one or two others, but otherwise, it makes no difference. And again, more people singing would be the encouragement needed. In that vein, he participated in the *chazan* debate, particularly as pertained to Jacobs. “She sang at a pace and fluidity that I was used to. Something that she did fit what I was used to. But I was concerned that the arrival of a *chazan* would not help in enabling singing here. It might have made it less easy to join in.” After the arrival of Zingerevich, he commented that the pace had sometimes so increased “it went at such a lick, that I could barely draw a breath between the lines” and was hoping that she would find herself and get a grip on the choir. He poses the same question to each musical director: “Is their primary concern professional singing to the best of their ability? Or will they help me to worship, to think, and to take me forward.”

Because he was not born Jewish he felt that he did not have “that emotional investment in what was here. And I like change anyway. I have no problem with novelty. I would try to listen to new pieces, or a new melody for an old text, with the proviso that I find it singable.

It is important how it is sung, whether it is so complex, sung in such a way that I cannot join in, which is when I would feel a loss. Otherwise, I might say, interesting, do I like it?"

He supports the returns to tradition, some of which he views as migrations from Shirah to the main service. "I like the chanting, because I can take part. I feel excluded when they read as my Hebrew is not good enough to keep up. The reading is too fast for me." When people stood and turned towards the door for *Lecha Dodi*, he said that he felt "instantly drawn into the service," most likely because this was a moment of embodied prayer such as he was used to. He is keenly aware of the tensions in Reform in the introduction of the contemporary and the reabsorption of the traditional.

IE's commitment to participatory singing is what propels him towards Shirah. Surprisingly, it is not the change of instrument, not the use of a guitar in place of an organ that encourages his involvement but rather, the nature of the seating. For him, the possibility of privacy and distance that the seating in the sanctuary allows detracts from the bonds of community that encourages participation and thus spiritual involvement. "We all like to do what the other is doing. In a close-knit group, even if they do not all know the song, the tunes are simple enough to 'lah' or hum along with. You can have that community spirit; that's what singing can do. 'He who sings well, prays twice.' At a non-Bat/Bar mitzvah service, I sit on my own with no one close to me, and I am conscious that I am singing, and wonder if I am upsetting the others. But Shabbat Shirah gives people permission to sing."

He notes that the attendance has decreased since the days of Cohen "although we still make more noise than in the main service!" However, this comment indicates that the music may not in and of itself draw people in; the charisma of the leader combined with the nature of the music is paramount. In fact, IE states that the most important thing for the age group particularly targeted by Shirah, people in their twenties and thirties, is the relationship with younger rabbis who offer many activities make them feel at home, and establish strong links with them. "Relationship counts far more than music."

If there is truth in that observation, then it will not only be a matter of changing the music, but of carefully selecting the leadership to emphasize charisma and charm. Neuberger's appointment is one example of this intention.

It also problematizes the nature of shared service leading. Cohen had, according to many “a voice which was brilliant and a remarkable ability to hold tunes and impart them to us.” In the absence of a dominating voice to hold the service, there is an attendant absence of influence over the shape, direction, and impact of a service. This suggests more and more that either the rabbis of the LBC need to be trained to sing, or that the movement may wish to move towards training and employing, not rabbis as their principle clergy, but rather cantors. And, in a mark of the change in status of the Reform cantors in the USA, they are now to receive *s’micha*, ordination, as the rabbis do, where formerly they would be ‘invested’. It is perhaps only the singing rabbi or the scholarly *chazan* who can move things in the direction desired.

HY is a former congregant of mine, married to IR, with two small children. For them, Shirah was a child friendly service to attend, and this was its draw. They too were brought in through Cohen at a time when young families made up a great proportion of the attendees. They could not relate to the general questions I posed, but “we had been directed towards Cohen when we wanted to have a baby naming. WLS was our nearest Reform synagogue, people told us he was nice, and we were able to have the ceremony at Shirah.” At the point that I spoke to them, IR related that “there is too much talking now. We used to come for the music, which we liked. I’m not sure that we will continue to pay our membership because we don’t enjoy it as much as we used to.” And in fact, I never saw them again at the services, (bearing in mind that I was not a frequent attender).

HY and IR represent one of the demographics WLS used to attract to Shirah, but the decline after Cohen left has led WLS to reassess Shirah, as mentioned above. HY and IR succinctly reported what much of the research into this age group has also uncovered – they are not keenly interested in either “maintaining synagogues for prayer” or coming “to pray in them.”<sup>277</sup> If we are witnessing a move from temporal to spatial Judaism, with the concomitant increased emphasis and importance attached to events in space, then, almost inevitably, younger people,<sup>278</sup> feel less of a sense of obligation to maintain synagogues for prayer or

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<sup>277</sup> “For the Congregation,” *Seder Hatefilot*, 248.

<sup>278</sup> This is not entirely generation. We must not overlook the many older people who no longer attend as well. Where once this age band would have assumed a mantle of duty and

other activities, if the institution is not offering meaningful programming to them. Thus, synagogues are thrust into an unholy tension between vocation and avocation, the desire to offer spiritually and Jewishly satisfying content to the lives of younger people who are often absent from the synagogue, and the need to attract them so as to ensure the continuation of the structure, the personnel and the continuity of Jewish traditions.

In tinkering with the hallowed paths, there is also the danger of alienating the faithful. CL feels that the leadership doesn't talk to the congregation and thus, is losing members. "We are losing it, lost it. And not only did we lose the beautiful tunes, but we lost the congregation as well. You see half as many people as you would have seen five years ago." He is very bitter about the changes, which he attributes to the rabbi and the new lay leadership. "It is all changing and this is the result of bad leadership. There are no musical or liturgical reasons for the changes, just vanity. And politics."

For CL, tradition is everything, although tradition in his eyes is a narrowly construed continuation of what has always been done in a certain way. "The new regime thinks that tradition is to dispense with. They invent a new lollipop to such every week. There is no legacy anymore, only the nouveau. I was brought up to believe in tradition. Next they'll change Hatikvah and tell me that we need to move on."

CL grew up in an Orthodox synagogue where the music of his childhood held no interest. He finds the music of WLS "Captivating, relaxing, introspective, and harmonious." For him, the function of the music in a service is "to make you sit back and ponder what you are doing there, why you are there, and focus you inwardly. It gives you a moment of peace, if you hit the right note."

He is not consistent however, but as with many who maintain such positions, there is little in the way of analysis of the intricate play between what they learn and when, and what they want to see preserved. "I would have been Orthodox but my wife converted. I was horrified to see the organ at first, but I got used to it. Then they brought in a guitar, and I walked out again, but then I got used to it." He would like to have seen the musical directors left alone to

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responsibility for synagogue maintenance, an increasing phenomenon finds this group, too, abandoning membership when it no longer meets their needs.

make decisions, unhampered by the Board, whom he perceives as arrogantly arrogating power to themselves. He would not, however, entertain the idea that, in the same way that he became accustomed and then attached to the organ (or even the sound of a woman's voice lifted in song, something forbidden in Orthodox synagogues), he could also learn to appreciate some of the newer melodies. "The tradition is important. Music is secondary. The *shul* is where you go to regain a bit of the past, to find good things, be better, etc. It's the legacy, the heritage."

AH is another convert, this time from a Catholic background. For him, "Music should focus everyone's attention to where they are." He is the one most serious about prayer itself, mystically-inclined. "Prayer for me is dialogue. Psalm is always in the third person, like a song, exalting the Divine, showing love of God and generally talking to God. That prayer takes you into some song, so you chant, sing, recite. Sometimes you are elevated in prayer and when elevated, you feel like singing. Prayer should lead you to a place where, when you get there, you should want to sing."

AH notices the dramatic inconsistencies. Catholic masses, like Salvation Army services, are purposely-designed to arouse spiritual feelings and awed responses, the music used to construct various types of moment of prayer. He had much to say about the appropriate, and inappropriate, uses of the organ. "The organ is identified with religious space, so immediately; an organ is associated with a place of prayer, as well as shutting people up as the service is to begin. You only hear the organ in a place of worship; it focuses the mind to the matter at hand, which is prayer. It has a big bellowing sound which you cannot ignore. It gets your attention immediately."

This is fine for assemblage, but at other junctures, it is a disruptive factor. "Singing a song with the organ in the middle breaks my prayer. The minute it comes in it is like breaking into the sacred space created. The flow of energy is broken." He is the only one to have commented on the ironic use of the organic amen, noted above in my observations. "I would do away with the organ amen. It is divided from the prayer and sits on its own. Disconnected. Amen is a closure, a sealing, an emphatic, to ground it, so the organ playing it has the opposite effect. I don't mind the choir doing it, together with the congregation."

For him, the meditative state is his spiritual destination. He believes that “the voice is an instrument in one frequency, the organ in a different one. Sometimes it works, but sometimes it breaks the flow of energy and of prayer.” He realizes that people hold different ideas about prayer. “For some, it is the routine, and it is comforting. Because it has always been done that way, people relate to it in that way.”

Like IE, AH sees peaks and troughs in the music and sections which are both climatic and central. For him, the organs should be playing “the introductory bit ends after *Mah Tov*, and then they should go into prayer without the organ.” He is the first interviewee to mention the idea of a flow in the service, non-episodic movements, and feels, as did IE, that the Torah service marks a rupture in this flow, because “this be the most important moment in the service. And to mark it musically is to elevate it to the next level.” When asked how music facilitates this, he replied that “when one is happy, one sings, one associates it with music, which has a higher frequency than voice. It is associated with change, it breaks a kind of unity and gives an opportunity to take it to a higher (or lower) level. It frames the moment, accentuates the Torah. The Torah is the moment we are building up to. The organ now lifts and helps to focus, to underline. In places where there is a natural break and your concentration is broken at that point, it is okay to have an organ.”

However, he wants that to cease with the end of the Torah service and for a return to ‘prayer.’ “There should be no organ and the *Aleynu* should be chanted. It is more powerful when you chant as a group; the organ takes away from the power of the communal singing. Then the *Adon Olam* with the organ is fine, as it is the end of the service. We have come full circle.” For AH, prayer is thinly defined to connote a particular aspect of the experience, with the grand organ music functioning in many respects as a section marker, a combination *Chatzi Kaddish* and *shofar*.

He does not mind the choir, except when it migrates into an operatic or church-like style, and, unlike many others, stresses its potential for having a positive role in encouraging singing: “The choir is great because it helps the congregation with the chanting and the singing. Sometimes the congregation does not know all of the words. If supported by the choir, they are more likely to sing along. If the choir helps, the prayer has more strength and more emphasis. ” But he feels that it does not always happen that way around: “The rabbis say ‘let’s join the choir’ but it should be the other way around. The congregation should lead the

choir because it should be the congregation that sings, not a third party. If you sit and listen, you break your concentration and you lose the prayer. And that would need a firm commitment from the congregation not to sit there passively.” He adds ruefully, “That is not going to happen at WLS!”

Other more informal conversations supported much of the preceding. The most interesting conversations were with younger people in the main service, some of whom exhibited hints of mystical absorption in the musical moments. One of these suggested that it was a “stereotype that the younger ones want the Shirah type service. I don’t, nor do some of my friends. It’s a stereotype. I find the music calming and peaceful here.” A cross-over observer has chosen to remain a member at WLS rather than FRS, not because of music, but because of the nature of the community; FRS, she felt, was so oriented towards family and children, that an older single woman with no children felt excluded. It is well to remember that musical presentations will not be the sole determinative criteria in choosing a synagogue.

## **4.8 Music on the Website**

WLS used to include a section called ‘Our Music’ on its website under the heading ‘Praying.’ It offered four opportunities to learn melodies; two via the MRJ itself, one for Shirah music and the other for the Family Service. The music of the main service was absent, perhaps supporting via this omission that it was not music for the congregation to learn. In a recent revision of the website, this section has been deleted.

## **4.9 Summary**

WLS is exceptional in the UK world, in that the direction and production of whose liturgical music, and thus, the spiritual tenor of whose service, is overwhelmingly the hands of professionals, most of whom non-Jewish, The music is produced in a hidden corner of the synagogue, in a loft, dimly visible through a lattice, anonymous, autonomous, and detached from the community for whom it is performing this act of worship. There are, thus, at least three distinct segments within the service – the choir and organ, the rabbis on the *bimah*, and the congregation. This is a fairly archaic classical Reform model. The invisibility of the choir, its placement as Other is in ironic tension with the fact that the music represents Otherness

tamed and incorporated. WLS's rather sclerotic model is pride in its legacy and the beauty of its execution. The music may very well be at the centre of the congregation's worship, as it marginalizes the congregation, and locates its performers at the spatial periphery.

Interesting relationships are established between the various actors and audiences at such services. The rabbis lead the services, but have very little input into its emotional valence, and are variously both actors and congregation with the rest of the community. The musical presentation of the main service has fluctuated over these years; currently, musically it maintains a fairly sombre pace, a marked degree of dramatic flourish, and cycles through quite a vast repertoire of music firmly rooted in music from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries.

There is a surfeit of sentiments surrounding the music and what to do about it, based on two overriding concerns. One is the experience of the individual who expresses a view which stems from their personal perspective. The other is the nagging concern to attract young people whom, it is erroneously believed, are alienated from the main service and thus from the synagogue. And a new conceit has surfaced, a belief that WLS is uniquely positioned to develop a BJ-like euphoric, teeming atmosphere, ignoring the very obvious differences in culture and demographics between London Jewish life and Manhattan Jewish life. To that end, Shirah offers a more rendered approach, the whole drawn together into a community that comprises rabbi, musicians, and congregation. By seating these segments in the space left uninhabited in the main service, Shirah symbolically attempts to dispel the separateness that pervades the main service.

WLS correctly offers options, an inexorable necessity in such a populous congregation with its tussling differences of attitude. And yet, on a few occasions, it has been the main service that saw a higher number of attendees. Some of this may be timing; Six o'clock is a more convenient hour for those who work in central London, a pause on the journey home; seven-fifteen may have proven to be too late for young families, once the initial enthusiasm for Shirah wore off.

As so much of the foment at WLS is reactive, revolving around the perception of the passivity of congregation at the main service, it is important to examine this. Many I spoke to refute the view that they are rendered passive; they contend that the music inspires



contemplation, inculcates inner peace, and is very evocative and meaningful to them. They perceive of spiritual experience as contained, interior, privately significant. They, and this includes many younger people, actively seek this genus of service.

It will be challenging to promote harmony when there is a very negative interpretation given by dissenters to services such as these. If one believes that people, in order to experience the service spiritually must partake, and, more importantly, long to do so, then when observing those in attendance, potentially erroneous conclusions may be drawn about the nature of their personal experience. Through the ethnography, I am able to assert that listening can be an active and engaging manner of spiritual engagement that some believe may not be enhanced through wider, or their own, participation. Perhaps this is because younger people (which might include all of those who have portable music players) are unable to distinguish between “...being “consumers” of music and...attentive listeners. It is too easy in a music-saturated culture to think that hearing is something quite passive. Because music has power to speak and to reveal more than the mere organization of sound, we ask: what can music require and even demand of us as hearers? It is to the “listening practices” we must turn in order to appreciate how important “active receptivity” is to recognizing and experiencing theological dimensions of music.”<sup>279</sup>

An appropriate analogy may be a concert of classical music, which those who appreciate such music may find intensely moving, emotionally satisfying, and even spiritually uplifting. Others may find that experience vapid and tedious, perhaps preferring a rock concert, during which they may clap, dance, and sing along. There is a tendency in the musical renewal movement to ignore the polysemic nature of prayer and music. “Even though the meaning of music rests ultimately “in the notes that human ears perceive, there can be...an almost infinite number of individual responses to its structure, depending on the cultural background and current emotional state of its listeners.”<sup>280</sup> Here at WLS, we are reminded that individuals seek different experiences in prayer, as in other aspects of life.

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<sup>279</sup> Don E. Saliers, *Music and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 67.

<sup>280</sup> John Blacking, *How Musical is Man* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), 19 and 21.

## CHAPTER FIVE– SINAI SYNAGOGUE, LEEDS

### 5.1 The Building - Entering the Portals

Sinai Synagogue is on a road which veers off a main artery, Street Lane, a suburban High street; the area around Street Lane has a high proportion of the Leeds Jewish population, with Jewish shops and other synagogues nearby. The synagogue building itself occupies a section of what is otherwise a residential neighbourhood and was built in 1960. There is green lawn and trees surrounding the synagogue building itself, and a car park on the side, next to the *shul* with sufficient space to avoid friction with the neighbours. When I first began my research, one could simply drive into the car park. They have subsequently erected a gate with a code. All must now stop at the gate, and either enter the code, or buzz to be admitted. This is a regression from the creed of welcome that prevailed during the Living Judaism era, possibly rendered necessary due to security concerns<sup>281</sup>. There are buses down the road on the busy Street Lane, a short walk away, and again, people will need either to enter a code or be admitted at a second gate leading to the front door.

As one approaches the front door, someone from the rota of members greets people. On occasions, they hand out *siddurim*, and on other occasions, barely mutter a salutation. At that point, you are in the large entrance hall of a single story, purpose-built building. You turn left and traverse the social hall, darkened and empty, kitchen to the side, tables laid awaiting the *Kiddush* at the end, pass through another door and you are then at the entrance to the sanctuary. It is not easy to find, the rooms are not directly linked and a stranger might need more guidance. Seamless welcome is not in evidence.

Upon entering the building, one begins preparing for the service in a series of mundane acts, such as hanging up ones coat; all spaces are disconnected, and one has the sense that the services occupy but one small corner of the premises, which you find after negotiating these various rooms and sections. One enters at the side of the sanctuary into a light and airy open space, modern and functional, not architecturally interesting. The layout is an increasingly

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<sup>281</sup> This is part of the wider dilemma of whether to relinquish congregational values for the sake of security.

popular one, although not ubiquitous, and one which Sinai alters when there is a Bar/Bat mitzvah. There are two rows at the back, facing the ark, and four or five rows on each side facing inwards. There is a large children's corner on left side as you enter, with its own bookshelf. One noteworthy aspect is the bookshelf located on the right wall of the entrance. It contains not only the standard *Chumash* [Torah readings], but also some alternatives such as the Women's Torah Commentary, This is something I have only ever seen in Conservative and Orthodox synagogues, that is, an espousal of study as an aspect of the service and the tacit permission to engage in exploration of variant commentaries during the Torah service. To some extent, people did avail themselves of this opportunity.

Upon entering the sanctuary, one finally engages with those in attendance for services. In this respect WLS, with its coffee, does a better job of setting the scene for community cohesion while the setting itself propels you ineluctably towards the sanctuary, building momentum with each act, including that of divesting oneself of one's coat, until the moment the service begins. Sinai, on the other hand, is a more informal arena, and if there is no musical or other creation of sacred space, there is a relaxed construction of congregational space. As a provincial congregation, there is a sense that people know each other and see each other more frequently than at WLS or even FRS. Journeys too to synagogue will be shorter and less stressful than those dealing with Central London traffic, so people arrive in a different frame of mind.

## **5.2 The Synagogue and Its Music – Some Historical Background**

Sinai was founded in 1944, after which it joined the ASGB. The impetus for its foundation came from Rabbi Reinhart, then rabbi of Alyth, through Rabbi Graf of the Bradford Reform synagogue, and as the then Rabbi of WLS, Rabbi Italiender, came to Leeds for visits, we note the early influence of WLS on its development.<sup>282</sup>

Ruth Sterne was one of the six who attended the inaugural service of January, 1944, which also included two people who were formerly members of WLS; she was from the outset an

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<sup>282</sup> For more on the history of Sinai Synagogue, see Ernest C. Sterne, *The Early History of Sinai Synagogue, Leeds, 1944 – 1970*. (Leeds: Self-published, 1985).

active member of the choir, which, at its incipience was not only all Jewish, but also only female. This represented a daring break with tradition in a city which had a number of Orthodox synagogues, and had, in the early 20th century, due to Russian and Polish Jewish immigration "...established a traditional pattern of religious life..."<sup>283</sup> Sterne stated that they had trouble getting men to join the choir, but, rather than alter the music, women would sing the tenor parts, although she did not remember how they handled the bass register. She believed that the function of the choir was, "to lead the singing", implying an encouragement to sing along. Mrs Schiff played, soloist Miss M. Mayer (who later went on to work in Bradford) and subsequently Mrs Plowman (active in Bradford) led the singing.

This synagogue followed a different trajectory than WLS, in that within 6 months of its incipience it had a voluntary choir composed of synagogue members,<sup>284</sup> and a *chazan*, Mr Taylor, who remained with them until 1954. The Sternes were themselves German refugees whose families had been members of Reform synagogues in Germany which had employed cantors; the engagement of a cantor in Leeds, in a movement in which many adherents had a visceral antagonism against this type of musical presentation stems both from the Eastern European background of the city and its synagogues, and the positive experiences of cantors that founders such as Sterne carried with them.

Taylor trained and conducted the choir, but when he left Sinai, like WLS's Sidney Fixman, he became a member once more of an Orthodox synagogue.<sup>285</sup> Sinai then engaged another Orthodox gentleman, Mr Lidor, an immigrant from Danzig, as leader of the choir,<sup>286</sup> with Ruth Sterne in administrative charge. Lidor choose the music, which was, at first primarily Lewandowski, amplified over time with the WLS music - "Lewandowski was the first

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<sup>283</sup> Ernest Krauz, *Leeds Jewry: Its History and Social Structure* (Cambridge: W. Hefer and Sons Ltd, 1964), 9.

<sup>284</sup> They were paid to sing at the High Holy Days.

<sup>285</sup> According to Ruth Sterne, he had to go to the Chief Rabbi to be cleansed! Later, some of his eight children became members in their own right at Sinai.

<sup>286</sup> According to Sterne, he continued as well at an Orthodox synagogue, although how that meshes with the cleansing Taylor underwent to be readmitted, remains a mystery.

building block; English hymns may have come later.” Sterne is not certain whether it was due to visits she and her late husband made to WLS, or to the fact that Reinhart had been a rabbi at WLS, but at some point, they had copies of the hymnal. As there were not sufficient numbers for everyone, whatever songs were sung from it<sup>287</sup> were performed by the choir and the congregation would listen. This rather controverts both their function as leaders of congregational singing, and the function of hymnals in encouraging communal singsongs. At any rate, Sterne believes that they only sang English hymns for two or three years.

The choir and the accompanist sang sequestered in a special section of the synagogue, on the same level as the congregation, but behind a wooden partition. As we noted in our section on WLS, the choir loft was a borrowed feature of Christian musical and architectural life, and whereas it made sense in the cathedral-like precincts of a WLS, it seems rather senseless in a small congregation with its own, in-house, choir. Sterne does not recall the reason for this separation – I would imagine it was simply the style, assumed without second thoughts.

It is rather unclear just whose responsibility it was to introduce music. This may be because Sterne is attempting to remember that which occurred some seventy years ago, and perhaps as well that Sinai inherited a musical tradition and maintained it in an organic process of development. Certainly it differs from the situation at WLS, where the music itself was under the purposeful direction of a Director of Music and eminent organist. These years, the 1940s, were the years of Lewandowski, brought over by German rabbis and with access to an ASGB body of musical works into which synagogues could simply delve.

By 1947, Sinai began to look for a building, although Sterne notes that "services were held regularly, even if criticisms were made about poor attendances and lack of decorum!" This complaint about poor attendance haunts the pre-history of WLS as well and supports the idea that this is no novel conundrum. The remark about lack of decorum is interesting, as decorum in the synagogue was a cardinal founding principle of the Reform world. This perception of widespread apathy led to concerns for the future of the *shul*, and the formation of a ritual committee to discuss the ‘problems.’

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<sup>287</sup> Sterne could only recall a piece called ‘From Eventide to Eventide,’ sung on Yom Kippur.

In 1948, the congregation engaged a Mr Webster, a non-Jew, as its organist – there is a question as to whether he was or was not also the Director of Music, or how he worked with the cantor. From its incipience until 1949, Leeds had the assistance of Rabbi Gerhard Graf, first as visiting rabbi, then later, as their rabbi. Sterne notes that it was Graf who introduced Sinai to a more systematic use of Lewandowski, which would become its characteristic music, and which would then fan out, through the efforts of Rabbi Henry Brandt, to other synagogues in the North. Graf was to play a seminal role in the cementing of the German Liberal tradition by introducing his two complete volumes of Lewandowski music; Sterne then ordered them from the USA from a catalogue; she believes that these volumes are languishing somewhere in a Sinai Synagogue cupboard.

Ernest Sterne<sup>288</sup> noted that in 1957 "a proper choir was formed, conducted by Mr N. Lidor and organised by Mrs H.R. Sterne. It soon considerably enhanced the services" In his endnotes, Sterne mentions that the choristers were known as "Henry Brandt's Dicky Birds" and that as of the time of the writing of his history in 1985, the Sinai choir still contained some of those original members.

The years 1957 - 1970 were known as the Brandt years, and it was this rabbi, Henry Brandt, who improved the status of the choir, such that they even recorded music to accompany sundry lectures that Brandt, originally from Germany, gave for the West Deutsch Rundfunk. It is not clear whether or not he introduced 'new' tunes, but, says Sterne, "Brandt may have suggested some, as he was in Israel before coming to us."

When Brandt left in 1970, Sinai engaged first Douglas Charing and then Uri Teimal as rabbis. In 1976, in the interregnum between rabbis, I became the student rabbi for a year, after which I migrated to Bradford. Sinai's choir rehearsed regularly and was active both in promulgating music to smaller synagogues in the North, and in participating and contributing to the musical offerings of the Movement. For many years, it was a highly regarded choir.

The musical direction changed with the introduction, in 1976, of the then new *Forms of Prayer*. This entailed musical amendments due to variations in the prayers themselves, but more importantly, it allowed them to amplify their repertoire due to the increased availability

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<sup>288</sup> Ruth Sterne's late husband.

of music from the RSGB Music Committee. Sometimes tunes were brought in from other *shuls*, but, says Sterne "As the music resources developed, we found new tunes for ourselves." Not only did the increasing emphasis on music emanating from the centre encourage the introduction of new melodies, but with the development of the role of Viv Bellos, "we were happy to attend choir meetings in London and Manchester, and Viv came to help us develop the singing and the choir. We may have picked up new tunes there, but we also learned about the voice and vocal development." The history colludes with the ethnography – the position Bellos held promoted the importance both of musical diversity in the movement, and of quality of execution, although, it is fair to say, not about the relationship of liturgy, appropriacy, and melody.

Perhaps because Ernest Sterne was married to choir stalwart Ruth, he paid more attention to the musical side of the synagogue's history. He mentions that "of a more permanent value was the creation of proper music files for all services. Music...was duplicated and put into folders." And indeed, these folders still remain and are easy to access. Of note is Sterne's comment that Brandt encouraged the creation of the Newcastle Reform Synagogue "for the introductory service...the whole choir was "exported" to Newcastle."<sup>289</sup>

This explains the importance of Sinai in the development and dissemination of the Reform choral tradition in the UK and the establishment of the important German Jewish composers as mainstays of the Movement's musical heritage. The choir maintained strong links with the musical centre in London, through travelling there and through visits from down South, and was serious about its musical development and in a breadth of repertoire.

In 1977, Rabbi Charles Emmanuel came to the pulpit. He was a non-singing rabbi and it is an open question as to whether or not he added melodies brought over from his native USA, but he and his successor, Walter Rothschild, another non-singer, both had the harmonium and the choir at their disposal. It was during this time that a floor level choir alcove was added.

It is significant that Rothschild had grown up in Bradford, which had had a seminal influence on Sinai's musical life, and was Sinai's first (and only!) British born rabbi. "I

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<sup>289</sup> I was the rabbi in NRS during much of the writing of this PhD, 2008 – 2013. It was a synagogue that, more than most, adhered to 'its' melodies with ferocious passion.

learned some things that we had not done in Bradford... such as an *Omer* [period between Passover and Shavuot] melody for *Lecha Dodi*,<sup>290</sup> all led by Ruth Sterne. In Bradford, we had had a succession of *Amidahs* and *Lecha Dodis*, but Ruth seemed to know them all. I did ask Viv for some of what she was preparing, and encouraged the choir to attend events in London, but the choir was functioning and organic. It was not dysfunctional. Ruth had the respect of the people, and it worked. I learned from them, not they from me.”

The current rabbi, Ian Morris, arrived in 1996. Morris was from Australia and had studied for the rabbinate in the USA. He found the music of the congregation “dire. It was classical stodgy harmonium driven, and made my wife feel that she had walked into the Dibley Parish Church. It was like a British comedy sketch; it was earnest and well-meaning, but awful, formal, four-part singing, by people who were not competent singers. And they used the most inflexible, inappropriate instrument, the harmonium, deemed to be the appropriate accompaniment in this country if you didn’t have a real organ, but is an instrument with no shading and no delicacy.”

Morris's tenure, and the major changes about to occur at Sinai perhaps coincided with a downturn in the quality of the choir, although it is fair to state that some controversy lingers concerning the demise of the choir. Sterne believed that it was because "we didn't get new members and we were therefore getting older. Some of us eventually stopped singing, whilst others left the city. It just faded away, in a manner of speaking.” When asked whether there was any pressure from the congregation to disband the choir, Sterne replied "That's a double-edged question. For a long time, there were some who wouldn't have minded if the choir disappeared, feeling that it was either not actually leading the congregation, or that the congregation didn't want to be led. It was, in the eyes of some, performing. There were others, however, who were sorry to see it go."

Michael Grant was the last Director of Music. He has been a member of Sinai his whole life, beginning his involvement as a teenager in the choir under the leadership of Lidor and the organist Arthur Weber. As Weber often had to leave the service early, Grant would be asked

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<sup>290</sup> This is noteworthy – most Reform synagogues do not avail themselves of the different melodies associated with various periods during the year. The Omer period is one of semi-mourning, and thus, a lively melody would disrupt the solemnity.



to play during the concluding service and thus, he has a deeply rooted involvement in Sinai's music. He recalls that the music was at first very much Lewandowski and Mombach, nothing very contemporary; he seemingly felt that there was not much choice at that point of what to incorporate, because "some of the stuff hadn't even been written," which again reinforces the impression of limited knowledge of the repertoire of the day. Sterne compiled a library which then tended to be the sole resource from which music was drawn, although this was amplified by involvement in the wider offerings of the movement. Grant remarked that "Prior to the days of Viv Bellos, nothing much changed because we didn't get out much, but then we did go to the music days away and brought back 'new music' which we mostly incorporated into the High Holy Days. We still have a choir for the High Holy Days and use that music that I brought from Viv. In those days I would have led the changes, but I haven't been to London in twenty five years, and the music we now sing is new to us."

When asked about reasons for the demise of the choir, others concurred with Sterne, "Old age. It just faded away. Ruth was the driving force, but with age, hadn't the *koach* [strength] to do it and those of a similar generation also drifted away for various reasons, ill health, etc., and it sort of faded away. And the fact is that Ian was quite vocal as well, and enjoys singing, so he took over and leads the singing, whether we join in or not." Sterne felt that herself. "I dropped out when I hadn't enough puff, but I was sorry to see it go. It was to my mind one a very valuable part of the service. It enhanced the service, made it livelier. It gave it another dimension, a different flavour."

There were negative aspects of choir membership for Sterne, and, she understands some of the reasons people would no longer commit themselves. Sinai's was a hidden choir and this would have created a perception that the choir was separate, not integrated with the rest of the congregation. As a consequence, choir members were themselves not able to participate actively in the service; For Sterne it meant that "although I heard the actual service, as leader, I had to listen, then get the choir up, telling them 'we're on', and that is quite a different type of attention, particularly on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur [which is a full days service.] It takes a lot of devotion when one has Friday night, Shabbat morning, and all of the festivals. It is onerous. But there is also a generational difference. It is more difficult to find people willing to do any volunteering, and there is a general lack of commitment to being available in these later generations. We volunteered and we generally stayed."

Some of this reflects the slow demise of provincial Jewish life in general – certainly the congregational choir of FRS [see below] and others in the greater London area attract new, younger, members. Events at Sinai need to be placed into the wider demographical context.

Morris was quick to praise the musicianship of Michael Grant, and the harmonium player, Margaret Silver; when she left<sup>291</sup>, Grant played, on Friday night only. “This meant we could restructure” and when I queried who was the ‘we’, he replied, “Me.” This musical revolution has been largely stoked and led by the Rabbi. There were disparate views about the harmonium and its suitability for the twentieth century, but there were also debates concerning the music and who should be singing it. They began a series of experiments, with rehearsed unison singers sitting outside the choir corner, or amongst the congregation, and retained a small choir, accompanied by harmonium, for the High Holy Days, but there was concern about who executed the musical content; some felt that the congregation had been disempowered. “What all of this meant was that a certain amount of the musical responsibility ended up with me,” noted Morris.

This represents a common model of synagogue prayer and musical leadership and the path that is taken by many synagogues attempting to grapple with the musical format of their services. It is this trend to which Viv Bellos referred in decrying the demise of the classical Reform model, the volunteer synagogue choir, its four part harmonies and its ‘musical heritage.’ She made particular mention of Sinai, whose choir she had rated quite highly. She felt that the departure of the choir has left the music flat and uninteresting.

It is important to note that Sinai was one of the original synagogues chosen by the Movement to pilot the Living Judaism scheme. Some of what I encountered here reflects its experiments with synagogue renewal, enthusiastically supported by Morris, who travelled to the USA to observe S2K projects. Of those synagogues engaged in Living Judaism, it was known as the most successful. That was, however, some years in the past, and many believe that the excitement and energy of those years has dissipated. They also no longer employ a designated community worker to manage change in the congregation. There was for some time an alternative service, but not one based around musical alternatives.

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<sup>291</sup> Silver left over an issue unrelated to the choir.

### 5.3 Musical and Liturgical Decision Making

As noted above, the responsibility for the shape of the service and its music falls primarily to the rabbi, Ian Morris, whilst those who lead as lay readers choose their own music. WLS had a complicated and variegated decision making process, whereas Sinai's is simpler and in keeping with its rather informal structural model. The rabbi has a great deal of independence and control over the format of the services, and such feedback as there is remains rather subterranean. Over the years I have been observing them, there have been some serious political conflagrations which have as their locus lay disagreements not centred around the rabbi, and because of this, the rabbi has a great deal of liturgical latitude.

Music in the services is of some, although not paramount, importance for Morris. He is interested in it, although puts very little of his efforts into it, having secured his original objective of transformation of their musical culture. His distaste for this form of aesthetic presentation reached back into his childhood: "I grew up with the harmonium and a very German classical Reform model of music. It was Lewandowski. And then we moved to another synagogue, because I found the tradition of that first synagogue appalling. There we had a German Director of Music, a pipe organ, and an elevated choir loft with invisible, largely non-Jewish choir. The Director of Music felt that music was to be listened to, that it was for professionals, not amateurs, and my brother and I would drive him nuts by joining in."

He experienced a model very similar to the WLS model, one which is aptly described as that of The Classical Reform service, although without the insertion of the music of Verrinder and Raphael, and the Sephardic influence. They did, however, have a parallel tradition, as was common in Germany and later in the USA, and that was, if not an invested cantor, then at least "trained singers who knew their liturgical music." The formality of the choral structure at Sinai and the absence of any cantorial tradition here "took me some time to sort out. I chatted with Viv [Bellos] about it, who maintained that it was an active decision of the Reform here not to have cantors as that was 'too Orthodox, too *frum*.' Bellos's comment echoes that of Karet, under whose leadership she first began to sing in the Alyth choir. Whether she inherited this opinion, or developed it independently, it has been a common one in the movement, over whose music she has had a significant impact.

Musical performance styles were therefore of significance to Morris, as they coloured his experiences in his childhood *shuls*. He was influenced both by these childhood experiences and the American Reform scene of the 1960s and 1970s, with its summer camp music and, in order to cultivate the kind of atmosphere he feels is appropriate, he assumes firm control over the music: “When I became a rabbi in Adelaide, which was a much smaller and more *heimisch* congregation, with a volunteer choir, I was in a position to have much more influence on how music worked there.”

Sinai was quite a challenge, for reasons outlined above, yet the melodic choices surprised him. “It was not very German. It was not as Lewandowski-esque as what I grew up with. It seemed to be more of a mix of melodies, piecemeal, based on what they could teach people.” This would reflect the era of Bellos and the gradual introduction of Israeli and even American music mentioned above. For British Jews, consistent musical style was not a priority – for Morris, an immigrant from a vastly different Jewish culture, one heavily influenced by the USA scene and its musical proficiency, it sounded simply chaotic.

The shift in the musical culture began with the Living Judaism project which entailed alterations in, among other things, the culture of welcome, the layout of the seating, and the music. With the retirement of the choir, responsibility for music fell primarily to Morris and to the lay leader of the day, with a rump choir for the High Holidays, accompanied by the harmonium.

Because the music was now no longer directed by a designated specialist, Morris concedes that “By and large, the music being applied comes from a limited repertoire, largely based on me and what I know. I occasionally pick things up, and some melodies remain the ones we used all along. But it is freer, easier, unaccompanied, doesn’t feel as ponderous as it used to.” And as is common in many British Reform synagogues, the fact that rabbis often bear the responsibility for the music of a service, means that the melodic aspect of a service is reliant on the ability and interest of the rabbi.

When asked in what manner the music is shaped for services, Morris states that he decides spontaneously on the melody to use on any given *Shabbat*, although admits that “I don’t have a head that is very good at extemporising or holding melodies where I want them. Sometimes I open my mouth but don’t necessarily know which one I will end up doing. I don’t always

know what triggers the melody that does come out, but I don't think it matters. It's haphazard, random; I don't have a plan." This comment indicates that the spontaneous nature of the experience is triumphant – and that, we shall see, pervades the services he leads.

In common with many others in the British Reform, Morris experienced *davenning* during his studies in Jerusalem<sup>292</sup> and began to introduce some chanting during the first half of the *Shabbat* morning service. "I tried it experimentally and it was reasonably well-received." When asked the reason for such a positive reception, he replied "I have a traditional bent and this is a congregation with a traditional bent, and the chant makes them feel that they are actually *davenning* a Jewish service." He adds, "Little do they know! I haven't learned the *nusach* properly, but even if I did, my mind doesn't hold melodies."

Again, much of this is in keeping with many *shuls* – its rabbis encounter *davenning* during stays in Jerusalem, in the USA, in *Masorti shuls* in the UK, or sometimes, because that is their background, and they wish to add the flavour of 'tradition' to the services they then lead back home. However, the study of *chazanut* is arduous, requires a strong musical background, and the memorization of many complicated musical variations, and although one can teach people some invariable formulae, most have not got the time nor the aptitude to engage in this. And so, rabbis introduce what they learn, which may not be accurate. Some have begun seriously to study *nusach*, as mentioned above, but Morris did not, and it is certainly true that what he employed was not always the appropriate chant for that prayer.

Morris confirms that the Living Judaism project had an impact on acceptance of change in the culture, and thus music, of the services. "People were in a headspace that things didn't have to be the way they had been just because they have always been that way." One piece stands out in particular, Danny Maseng's melody for *Mah Tov*. In common with many synagogues, this was the first 'new' piece introduced, and also one of the most enduring, although, with the benefit of a longer history in the UK, I know that the first piece of Americana that people encountered was the Klepper *Shalom Rav*. Nonetheless, the Maseng

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<sup>292</sup> HUC in the USA requires all first year rabbinical students to spend their first year in Jerusalem, honing their Hebrew skills. Israeli Reform synagogues, without a need to pray in English for the sake of congregants with attenuated Hebrew skills, are freer to experiment with musical styles. And, as well, as has been noted, American Reform is more comfortable with the use of traditional styles, and indeed with the institution of *chazanut*.

*Mah Tov* has become a memorable pivot point. “We did a concert with Danny Maseng here, and it had an impact in introducing people to music they had never heard before, particularly his *Mah Tov*, which was accepted on the spot. It did broaden the horizons, and broke down the idea that it was impossible to change things.” The new *siddur* did not have a particular impact on the changes, which, as noted, were being implemented during the Living Judaism experiment.

## 5.4 The Services

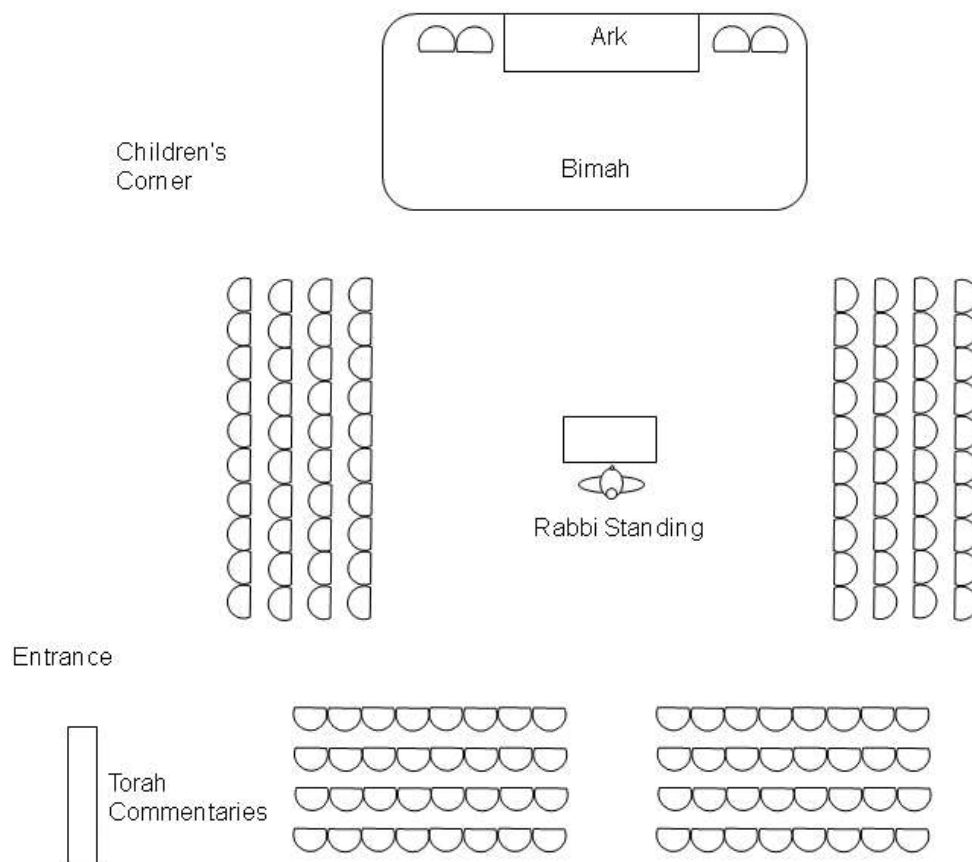
Congregations tend to be small (between ten and twenty five) on a Friday night, ages between thirty and eighty, but are much larger in the morning, with the addition of more younger people and families; children and Bar/Bat mitzvah students wander in and out. The majority of the attendees nevertheless seem to be rooted in the fifties to eighties age group. Many of the older members sit in the back, in the forward-facing seats, in suits or other formal attire, but overall, people are dressed in casual-comfortable clothing. It is a fairly homogeneous group, with the inclusion of two black people, but in appearance and dress, it seems a fairly middle class congregation.

The atmosphere before the service begins is relaxed. I know some of the people so can greet and mingle. Friday night is similar to the situation at WLS, in that there is no activity between entering the building and the preparation for, and execution of, the services. There is no musical liminality, nor is there the same sense of ascending physical sacredness. What atmosphere there is is created through greetings, chatting, and generally settling in.

Before the service, the rabbi mingles amongst the congregation, greeting people, clad in suit and *tallit*; he moves to start the service from this position of ‘withinedness.’ The service begins informally, with organized casualness, when the rabbi moves towards the reader’s podium, sometimes calling out a rather self-deprecatory comment, or something jocular to someone or another. These liminal moments build connections between the rabbi and the congregation, but are not spiritual or sacred moments, as at WLS.

Having established himself as accessible and welcoming, he then takes his place at reader's podium with his back to the rows and in the same direction as those facing the *bimah*, and

fairly far forward, so that his face is only visible to those who are themselves sitting further forward and facing in. This is an unusual stance for the *shatz* in a Reform synagogue and sets his style out as just that, a *shaliach tzibur* as in a traditional synagogue setting where the one leading the prayers is both separate from yet embedded within, the praying congregation. Again, it is a curious contrast to the informal manner in which he began; at WLS, the rabbis enter and face the congregation, but from a great height, and clad in gowns, as the community rises to honour them during *Mah Tovu*.



*Sh'liach tzibur* is not a term generally preferred in the Reform world, which tends to eschew traditional terminology in favour of functionary language borrowed from the churches: 'cantor', 'prayer leader', 'warden', 'honourees', this is language which accompanies the borrowing of other aspects drawn from the world of the church, such as the harmonic style, the organ, and the full frontal service leading. Perhaps the most crucial distinction between prayer leader and *shatz* is that the former dominates the proceedings and is in charge, but not one of the community, in the tradition of Jewish prayer, the idea that the one at the front is an

'emissary of the community' means that this person is the guiding pray-er, but still one amongst others, a 'with-guider/*mit-davener*.'

At WLS, the rabbis face the congregation and are raised above and dominate the synagogue, what Kunin termed "...the centralized model of sacred space..."<sup>293</sup> but the music is hidden, except when the rabbis lead it – and some of that they also do with backs to the congregation. At Sinai, the service is conducted with the rabbi at congregational level, and occupying a number of roles and functions that at WLS are assigned to different people. Sinai's model of rabbinical jack-of-all-trades service leadership is a common MRJ model, particularly in the smaller synagogues.

Morris begins to sing. On a Friday night, it is often *Bim Bam*, with neo-Chassidic syllabic insertions. Candles are then lit, sometimes another flippant comment might be made concerning someone entering, or some similar remark, and then he will announce the page. Page number announcements are rarer than at WLS (or FRS), and tend to be clustered around the beginning of the service and sometimes emphatically dictated, but trail off later, during the main corpus of the prayers.

The music that functions to mark the beginning of the service on a Shabbat morning is, *Mah Tov*. On both Friday night and Shabbat morning, they use either a Lewandowski melodies or the Maseng. Morris leads at a very rapid pace, and in an idiosyncratic style. In the Maseng, he modulates for the repetition of the refrain, and then completes the piece, which is actually a through-composed work, after just one verse, reading the rest in Hebrew. Morris is not a musician, and does not work from a musical text – it is clear that he learns music aurally, subsequently presenting the melodies to the congregation, who thus learn from him his version; this creates a Sinai Synagogue style. In this regard, the composed works function in much the same way as chant, in that they are treated as more akin to a folk tradition with communal variations.

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<sup>293</sup> Seth Daniel Kunin, *God's Place in The World Sacred Space and Sacred Place in Judaism* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1998). Sinai Synagogue and FRS are rudimentary examples of the Orthodox "...segmentary, decentralized model of Jewish sacred space." 96.



One's attention during the service is on the rabbi, and here the stark difference in a traditional congregation and this Reform-traditional congregation come into sharp relief. Participants in a traditional service generally understand some Hebrew, or at least, can read it, and are knowledgeable about the service. When they are not invested in the proceedings, as is the case with many Orthodox women, they will opt out altogether, resorting to chatting amongst themselves, or, at best, appearing to an observer as spectators. In Reform synagogues, there is a marked degree of regimentation, which goes hand in hand with the strong frontal model of service leading, and this regimentation includes copious instructions in standing and sitting, calling out of page numbers, and exhortations to join in. People in Reform services are apt to wait for their cues, and, as has been noted, the episodic style means that individuals tend not to immerse themselves in their own prayers, are not alone-together, as is the case in more traditional *shuls*.

In considering these two exemplars, the forward-facing theatre model, and the ark-facing, back-to-congregation model, one wonders what differences they make in the prayer experience. In the interviews, no one commented on it, except for the rabbis. It was one of the suggested changes emerging from Living Judaism, which stressed a descent from the *bimah*, the rabbi/leader implanted in the congregation, the repositioning of seating to breakdown the performance model of prayer, circular or, in one widely adapted borrowing from tradition, the 'U' shaped layout, and everyone on one level. I experimented with this in Newcastle. People found it terribly distracting, as they needed to read the cues on my face in order to know what to do. It is a leadership stance which engages with the congregation as independent, mature pray-ers, who will assume responsibility for their own prayer.

Morris's choices correspond to his often stated sentiment that Sinai and he are rather more traditional, and in this aspect, one senses that he has structured the services with a marked traditional form, his back to congregation stance reinforced by the absence of musical instruments and the style of delivery of the prayers. His service leading is both heartfelt and distinctive. There is little interruption, sometimes even omitting the page numbers, and thus he establishes a flow into which one can subside. Quite a bit is sung, but generally speaking, the services are characterized by interspersed musical moments rather than service dominated by music. There is some chanting using basic *nusach* motifs, and the amount of chanting has been increasing over the times I have been visiting, although, as noted, it is not always the appropriate *nusach*.

The Rabbi has a rich and appealing singing voice, but little sense of rhythm. His position, posterior to congregation and slightly aloof, affords him a strong sense of leadership, through which he can set a pace regardless of the reactions of the synagogue, and although this is a legitimate form of Jewish prayer stewardship, it relies for its efficacy on the existence of a highly educated and independent praying community themselves immersed in their prayers without regard for collective, unison participation, or an extremely skilled singer, who can hold them together with a strong rhythmic sense. As it is, however 'traditional' the Sinai congregation is, one notes that they still await instruction as to when to join in and when to stand, and, in fact, one senses that we have a kind of dissonance between intent and production. This dissonance permeates many other aspects of the experience at Sinai.

One might characterize the Rabbi's style as self-indulgent, in that he maintains no regular pace, varying tempi at will, and often abruptly cuts off at end of sung pieces. Therefore, it is actually quite difficult to join in with him, and thus, there is little participation in the musical side of the services and even with the declaimed passages. It makes for a rather quiescent atmosphere, into which you can lose yourself a bit; it is neither jarring, nor disruptive, but neither is it compelling, emotionally stirring, nor inviting of participation. It is, however, peaceful and fluid. Over the years, I found his sense rhythm has improved somewhat, thus enabling a greater degree of involvement.

In using the Schiller typology, one could say that there are no moments under the rubric of Majestic, there is very little Meeting and Meditative music, and far more of Momentum and Memory.

It is not certain how important services are in IM's overall community work. On many of the *shabbatot* I attended, there was no sermon, but rather, a piece of text discussed, or a kind of opening presentation followed by an eliciting of views from the congregational about an issue from the news, or from within the local Jewish community, or concerning Israel. These are open forums, often without a relationship to the *parashah* as one would find in most synagogues, presented with an extemporaneous flavour. So, 'community' is constructed in that guise, through democratic open forums on Shabbat am, but not predominantly through the prayers and the music.

On a Friday night, after *Mah Tov*, Morris immediately moves into one of the *zemirot*, such as *Yom Zeh*, which he leads with gusto. He then announces *Shalom Aleichem* employing the standard Binder melody, unusually singing it as composed, ABBA. He *ritards* at the end of many pieces, to indicate the end. He then reads one of the Sabbath Psalms, generally in Hebrew, after which they move on to *Lecha Dodi*. The melody used is the ubiquitous one of unknown origin, which supplanted the Lewandowski version in the 1980s. We begin to remark that musical change is sometimes simply exchange, exchange of one standard melody for another, which then becomes unalterable. He does, as with *Shalom Aleichem*, sing this ‘correctly,’ that is, without the Anglo-Reform modifications; the composed version requires a compacted and rapid rendering of the last few words, which, in most synagogues, has been elongated and added with a parcel of melody to the end. The congregation stands and turns towards the door to bow, but there are a couple of people who will not do this. He marks the bowing with a slight *rallentando*. To complete *Kabbalat Shabbat*, he moves immediately into Psalm 92, another tune of unknown provenance and which again supplanted a well-embedded Lewandowski melody. He completes it by reading it in Hebrew, then moves straight into Psalm 93, read in English. His English reading style is quite pleasant. He does not adopt a ‘preacher-style’ voice, but reads with an eye to drawing out the meaning of whatever he is presenting.

After *Mah Tov* on Shabbat morning, the subsequent pages are chanted in their entirety, without interruptions, and all in Hebrew. People joined in to the best of their ability, but, although a ‘traditional’ congregation, they do not respond with ‘amen’ at the appropriate junctures. Morris chants using the weekday motifs rather than the Shabbat morning ones for *Birchot Hashachar*. The first English passage occurred on p. 166, coinciding with the first passage not to be sung or chanted. People joined in reading both the Hebrew and the English, although it was not unanimous. The reading was also swift; if other rabbis emphasize the prayers, reading them concertedly, both to enable others to keep up, but also, for emphasized meaning, Morris tends towards the creation of a holistic atmosphere, redolent of a traditional service in which obligation and mood trump meaning. *Adonai Melech* on p. 171 is sung to the old standard RSGB melody, with a different ending than normally used.

*Pesukei d’Zimra* opened with a reading, in Hebrew, of *Baruch She’amar*, p. 172, congregation seated, and then to the Kol Beseder version of Psalm 92; Psalm 93 is read in English, then he jumps, often without page reference, to Psalm 150, leading the popular

refrain version of the Psalm. He then announced a skip to p.199, read in Hebrew with the congregation voicing the ‘amens’ and then led a kind of chant for *Nishmat*. After this, there was another page announcement, as the service progressed to *Shochan Ad*, which, surprisingly, he read, as he did *Yishtabach*<sup>294</sup>; *Chatzi Kaddish* was chanted, although not to the common melody; again, the congregation, does not observe the call and response rubrics, tending to join in at two passages that are deemed to be the prerogative of the *shatz*, and not the ones in bold lettering assigned to the congregation. They did voice the ‘amens.’ These educational rubrics inserted to guide people on how to participate were here, and in many other synagogues I visited, largely ignored as they contradicted the previous styles of participation.

On Friday night and Shabbat morning, the next section opens with the *Barechu*, sung on both occasions to the Friday night Lewandowski melody common throughout the movement, also done quickly; there is virtually no variation in tempo to mark sections or new or different moods, nor does he repeat the first line.

On Friday night, he will read one of the subsequent two prayers in Hebrew and one in English; on Shabbat morning, two prayers are read in Hebrew. At both services he moved directly on to the *Shema*, sung to the standard RSGB melody, by Sulzer, emphasizes the ט and then leads the congregation in chanting the *V’ahavta*, as is increasingly common, but utilizing the Eastern European trope commonly used in the USA, and not the Western European trope used in the UK. The Australian Reform community from which he stems is often served by American-trained rabbis and Morris himself matriculated from HUC, not LBC. As he himself does not chant the Torah, he is perhaps not as aware of the variations between Eastern and Western European melodies. As the *V’ahavta* was formerly not chanted here, although invariably chanted in the USA, many rabbis learned it in North America. Morris is not a cantor, and this highlights the problem of rabbis thrust into this role, who develop musical skills informally, never developing real expertise. And it is also expressive of the hegemony of North American music, as many rabbis and lay people have only been exposed to chants and trope through American Reform auspices - the MRJ itself promotes

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<sup>294</sup> Surprise, because these are standard moments of chant, which most Reform synagogues have reinstated, and one would have assumed that a service with so much *nusach* would have had *nusach* at this transitional moment.

attendance at URJ [Union of Reform Judaism, the North American reform movement] conventions, and, others of the rabbis garnered what they could through the Living Judaism programme of visits to the USA. *Shirei Hatefilah* includes the *V'ahavta* using Western European trope, but requires rabbis able to read music, and/or interested enough in pursuing accurate renditions. After a very brief silence, *L'man* was chanted to the usual Lewandowski melody, which is, ironically a smoothed out rendering of the Western European trope.

Both services continue with *Emet*, read in Hebrew, with *Mi Chamocah* sung to the Silverman melody. Having finally established a lively participatory atmosphere, one feels it is a lost opportunity not to continue with the neo-Chassidic syllabic insertions common to this melody. On Friday night, he reads *Hashkiveinu* in English, but with a definite 4/4 swing to it, then right on to *V'shamru*, arriving with great force at the end of each syllable. Finally, he chants the *Chatzi Kaddish*, sliding into and lingering on *Yisrael*, and, 'amen.' On Shabbat morning, the section ends with a recited *Tzur Yisraeil*, as they move directly and silently into the *Amidah*.

The *Amidah* begins with the standard melody for *Adonai Sefatai*, repeated twice in Hebrew, but then, Morris reads<sup>295</sup> the first two paragraphs, with noticeable participation. For the *Shabbat* morning *K'dushah*, he reads the Hebrew whilst the congregation joins in the standard Lewandowski responses. He then chants *L'dor Vador* in eastern European nusach, which utilizes a minor motif at this point, in contrast to the major motif favoured by the UK Reform world. *Yismach Moshe* is read, and *V'shamru* sung to the popular Rothblum strophic version, with which everyone joined in. The verses are done freestyle, whereas the refrain is more metric. On Friday night, he does not sing the *Shabbat* paragraph.

The rest of the *Amidah* is read, with some English on Friday night, all in Hebrew on *Shabbat* morning, in almost as idiosyncratic a manner as the singing, but people do join in, and, in contrast to WLS, do not need to be invited to do so. On Friday night, he leads the Janowski<sup>296</sup> version of *Shalom Rav*, not commonly done here, and has a brief moment for silent prayer.

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<sup>295</sup> He told me used to sing the *Avot* before the addition of the matriarchs and now 'cannot get the melody with the additional words into his head.'

<sup>296</sup> Max Janowski, 1912 – 1991, born in Berlin, later worked in the USA, composer of Jewish liturgical music and Director of Music at a *shul* in Chicago.

On *Shabbat* morning, he allows a good amount of silence for the end of the *Amidah*, a calm note in a service otherwise marked with rapidity of presentation; during both, there is a lusty, participatory rendering of the standard Chassidic song festival version of *Oseh Shalom*.

Friday night does not include a sermon. Sometimes he speaks to the congregation about *shul* business; this exemplifies his approach, which is to communicate through a comfortable informality when turned around, but then to pray with a stance of distance. He establishes through this both a sense of community, and, as well, a demarcation of ‘off’ and ‘on’ times during the prayer, however, none of this is done through music. In contrast to both WLS and FRS, the drawing together of the congregation is achieved through a sort of subtle humour, generated by Morris, and even sometimes directed against himself; he is supremely in control, but exudes this quite subtlety, such that it appears as a joint control. He never entreats people to participate, whether in prayer or in activities, and he weaves Sinai lightly around them, so that a non-member feels included, in a way that FRS, as we shall see, cannot do. This is, for one, the synagogue with the longest service rabbi of the three studied, and, as well, the only one in the Provinces, where ‘community’ arises more organically, through proximity, and through history, and through lack of other, non-Orthodox, options.

Friday night service concludes with the *Aleynu*, the first paragraph sung, the second read, often using the alternate version. He recites names before *Kaddish*, which everyone joins in reading, then briskly chants *Kiddush*. Announcements are offered, or solicited by Morris, and the service often ends without a concluding hymn, nor a blessing, but with a simple *Shabbat Shalom*.

I attended one Friday night service led by Grant, in which, although there was not a noticeable increase in different melodies, there was far more singing. And one Friday, the singing was led by the then student rabbi Hugenholtz, who added far more of the music now circulating in the movement, with podium pounding rhythmic accompaniment, and eyes closed, visible to the congregation as the podium was further from the ark, and she stood at its side, turning slightly to the congregation when singing.

On *Shabbat* morning, the service continues with the Torah service, the music including all of the standard RSGB music –they neither sing nor turn and bow for *Gadlu*. Sometimes they sang a new melody for the first *V’zot*, alternating with the standard number. The reading is

usually done by Morris, haltingly; the *Brachot* are sometimes chanted, depending on who is called up. On one visit, the *Parasha* had been divided between three lay readers, who chanted their sections, and all the *Brachot* were chanted.<sup>297</sup> The Haftarah blessings are only occasionally chanted.

I have never heard a formal composed sermon; Morris usually comments on material printed on the weekly *Shabbat* hand-out ‘Hashavuah’ or an article from the news, Jewish or otherwise, which is sometimes circulated to the congregation. These talks, even during the study passage slot in a service, have an impromptu flavour, and further illustrate the very casual, rather matter-of-fact atmosphere which encourages or allows unscripted contributions from the congregation, during which Morris displays no signs of impatience. He neither commands from the pulpit through a sermon, nor directs from the pulpit a formal discussion, but rather accepts and therefore invites unprompted responses from the congregation. There is an unusual mix of commanding presence throughout the musical presentations, coupled with a seemingly improvised presentation of what is normally the purview of the rabbi, educating and preaching. Perhaps it has been an important aspect of Morris’s ability to remain aloof from internecine battles that he is verbally non-committal and therefore does not attract opprobrium, but it also appears to me as if he does not place much emphasis on preparing for services. And perhaps his relaxed manner derives in part from his Australian background.

The concluding prayers are done as per Friday night, omitting *Kiddush*, and with a more formal set of announcements. They conclude the whole with *Adon Olam*, sung to one of the standard melodies, then the congregation adjourns to the hall for *Kiddush*, *Motzi*, and a bit to eat.

With Sinai, we have one conventional model of service and musical directorship, namely, these two aspects combined in a rabbi with no formal cantorial training, some exposure to traditional chants, and an attractive though untrained voice, performing all of the functions of rabbi, *chazan*, and choir. Morris dominates the pulpit in a genial manner, through years of tenure and with an assured manner.

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<sup>297</sup> Many members of Reform synagogue only know the Bar/Bat Mitzvah melody, and use that one at a regular Shabbat. I have never heard this at Sinai Synagogue.

## 5.5 Reception and Rejection – The Congregation

The people interviewed had some clear theories of the function of music in the service. TM states “it is about creating a communal spirit, an uplift, which is important.” He spoke of the interplay between music and recitation, implying that for him, music stands at the centre and the spoken word is a bit of a distraction. “Music breaks up the reading of page after page of Hebrew, and helps to bring people back together. Reading can be at any pace, but music unites the congregation in one pace. It aids my spiritual experience. It feels to me that there is a stronger connection with God if you are singing that is a more powerful experience of what you are trying to say. It gives me time to fathom the meaning of what the prayer is about.” He compared this to his experiences in an Orthodox *shul* where “they raced through the prayers and I didn’t feel I was getting any spiritual gain, because I wasn’t engaging with it.”

CR is the first interviewee to quote musical Biblical references when he stated that “music is there to inspire and engage, I mean, after all, Psalm after Psalm mentions instruments. It appeals to a deep part of the human psyche. I’ve read about how music is used to rouse people for brain traumas, as well as having a therapeutic effect on people in a deep coma. David helped Saul, who was in a very black mood. And my wife lost her best friend recently. Someone came around with a guitar, we sang, and it lifted everyone’s spirits.”

AF feels that “music provides an opportunity for people to join in and play an active role. And it creates an atmosphere and a mood that you would not have if you just came in and read the prayers. There is a sense of familiarity, a traditional rootedness, that this is what other generations did, that is more emotive than just reading, as well as offering a different way to think about the service, giving a sense of structure. A purely spoken service would be very dull. ”

The idea that music adds an additional aspect to the service is echoed by others. IE was passionate about this: “A service without music would be very bland and one dimensional. Oh no, there’s got to be music in the service in whatever form! This enhances the community and brings them together to sing. I couldn’t think of having a service without any singing at all. It’s just me; I was brought up with it.” And for NU, music “seems to enhance the service.



By enhance, I mean, it is like leaven. It widens the, not scope, the horizon of the service, the whole context and content. Difficult...I cannot explain it any further.”

It is quite fascinating that people ascribe to music properties that could be equally aspects of communal reading, but which they clearly believe is almost solely in the power of music.

CR adds an important element when he says that “music gets people thinking together, in a way. It moves people, that’s why. It links you with your past, is very intrinsic, a very important part of the service, an emotional button.” He touches upon the something subtle that others skirt around, “Music is part of the tradition, almost as important as most of the other elements of Judaism that people who aren’t religious still hold onto. Like food, *Pesach seders*, *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, these are the things that hang on when other things have gone, as well as ways of thinking. Music is like that.” Here he hints that music is a potent identificatory element in an attenuated Jewish identity, and makes one wonder whether something about musical memory should be included on questionnaires surveying degrees of affiliation and practise amongst contemporary Jews.

WW is the only one to mention spirituality in her description of the function of music in a service as well as shifting attention away from the words themselves. “Music can be spiritual, can’t it? It can lift you out of the banality of your everyday life into something special. And even though the words may mean nothing to me, the actual experience could be useful with music.” Although she places less import on the words of the liturgy, other, non-musical aspects of the service are important to her. “I go mainly to get away, to take time out from the daily routine. I think about things in general. I also think about things in the Torah portion. And I can usually understand the sermons, which make you think about life.” It is clear that music for WW is one element of an experience which is other and special, perhaps holy, in a way rarely articulate by interviewees.

It is clear that music at Sinai is a topic of quiet muttering and some dissatisfaction. For one, the memory of the choir lingers, in that it presents a backdrop as to where music was and where it currently is, stoked by the use of a ‘singing group’ of some ten to twelve people, who sit amongst the congregation to support the singing during the High Holy Days. The choir had achieved a degree of accolade through its hard work and participation in the larger Reform musical world of its time. The changes in the musical presentation are recent enough

to echo in people's minds, although on the other hand, there was not the same level of angst and argumentation about music as at the other synagogues I studied.

SH echoes Bellos (whose opinions still surface in Leeds) when he says that "I think music has a big place in the whole movement, and it's a shame that we are losing, have lost, its choral base, but that is inevitable." Bellos herself commented on the demise of Sinai's choir, and the lost potential for dramatic variety in the music: "Leeds is so sad, as it used to have a nice choir. Ian sings his tunes, Australian, or what he has picked up. There are very few people at the service. It hasn't got the vibrancy of a London community - I would have expected the Reform synagogue to have a lot more buzz and oomph about it."

NU confirms that the passing of the choir was mourned, although emphasizes that some wished it would disappear! He feels as mentioned by others that "it enhanced the service, made it livelier, and gave it another dimension, a different flavour. The services have definitely lost something by not having a choir, the fullness of the music, the intensity, something like that. It is as if there is a little tinge missing, a slight lack of something."

WW is also a former choir member, who feels that the services were much more musical when the choir sang. "Some of the music we used to sing was very pleasing on the spinal cord. I remember the *Barechu*, which was sung very beautifully." She spoke of a congregational weekend away, in which the question was asked, 'what did Sinai do better before'. "Some said the choir and organ, some said the choir but not the organ, and so it goes on." And one older member, ED, notes that "We used to have a nice choir. I did enjoy it. It was different, it made it interesting, and it was a great disappointment to me and others when they decided to disband the choir. I would like it back; I think it would be nice."

Leeds itself is a community, as noted above, known for its strong Orthodox, Eastern European background, and those who had once been members of the Orthodox world sometimes had a different view, not so much about the choir, but rather more about the harmonium, almost always referred to as 'the organ.' "I don't miss the organ. It reminded me of church. It was miserable. I always found the organ an uninspiring piece of musical equipment and I still do."

There was significant commentary about the rabbi, his musical ability, and his facility or lack thereof in encouraging participation. Most feel he has a good voice, although there is disagreement about his musicality. The opinion is expressed that, as I perceived, music is not terribly important to Morris nor is participation, and many of those interviewed mentioned the difficulties I also experienced with joining in. CR: “His notes are beyond the ability of most people, although he has a good voice. I have never heard him invite people to sing along. I don’t think he looks for that; he is not bothered one way or the other.” WW feels the same. “The rabbi does it just as he does everything else. I don’t think music is a particularly important part of the service.” IE states “I would like to think that Ian’s singing discourages participation, as he never sings the same thing in the same key from week to week.”

Others disagree. ZE: “I like Ian’s singing on the whole. It’s musical. A lot of rabbis and *chazanim* are not very musical;” NU feels that in Ian “the music is kept up by our rabbi/*chazan*, our ‘two for the price of one’” although he does add that he reads too quickly, whilst TM, a university student, notes that “I went once when the rabbi wasn’t there and there was less music, sung not as loud nor as forthrightly.” There is an interesting amount of attention paid to the voice of the rabbi – as rabbis assume this heightened function of song leader-soloist, the quality of the musical presentation of rabbis becomes of real significance. If music is the fulcrum around which all synagogue revival revolves, then serious attention needs to be focused on what this signifies for rabbinical recruitment, training and placement.

In all three synagogues, modifications in the musical environment touch quite profoundly held beliefs about the heritage and traditions of the individual synagogue, about the nature of prayer, and about the individual’s personal experience within the service itself. The change-maker will, as a matter of course, become a central focus for discussions concerning all of the above, and more so, when as in the case of Morris, they replace a previously existing tradition with something quite dissimilar. Morris has placed himself at the forefront of music, but there lingers in its wake a sense of uncertainty, regret, and perhaps even anxiety. And this perception is heightened by questions to do with the actual music itself.

IE continues, echoing comments of other members who prefer the Lewandowski of former times: “We’ve been dragged into the twenty-first century, but I still prefer the old Germanic stuff. It was more full and wholesome. Some of the melodies Ian uses are not so, they’re just too modern, not too modern, I cannot think of the word. Some of it seems to me more of a

chanting sound than a choral style. You could not get a choir to do it. It's more soloistic. That's it. Soloistic. If I was in the congregation when the choir was singing, I would personally join it, because the choral melodies are more attractive to me."

These comments were echoed by those for whom the choir (only disbanded eighteen years ago), and its music were emblematic of services at Sinai. I have encountered similar sentiments in Newcastle, which inherited Sinai's music. Although the choir in Newcastle was disbanded in a more distant past, there was a strong feeling that 'this is our music' bound up as well with the memory of the deceased former choir leader and founder member, Claire Jacobson. There is a potent nostalgia for former times, when services were well attended, and somehow, the decrease in attendance in these demographically fading congregations, is sometimes blamed on change of music. The use of the word 'tradition' is indicative, as it is a reflexive, under-defined concept which is wielded by people both to protect themselves from encroaching change and to obviate the need to examine what they mean and what they fear.

I asked interviewees to define 'tradition'. TC feels it means "that it's always been there over the years, something you're used to. I wouldn't like any change. The whole point is to go to *shul* on a certain day and it should be like before. When you change things, it becomes unacceptable. That's how it is. Some religions make things more modern, and it's not acceptable. People with religion don't like change." When asked if one were to introduce a melody that was even older than one currently sung, she replied, "A little bit would be acceptable. Once we're used to it, it becomes very acceptable." For TM, tradition is "whatever I'm used to as a person, passed on from dad to dad. Tradition is familial bonds, as opposed to the broader Anglo-Jewish tradition. The tunes I sing are the ones my dad used to sing." For AH, it is about "a sense of familiarity, the sense of traditional rootedness, what other generations did."

Although there is in reality very little 'new music' at Sinai, the general perception is that there has been a lot of change, with specific melodies being cited as evidence. Many of the comments revolve around taste – people react to the melodies not for the overall affect or atmosphere created, as at WLS, and in the main not with regard for the way melodies carry the meaning of the text, but rather, the general appeal of a particular sound. One senses the a latent struggle between those who want what was, and those open to change. Those in the latter category are often actively involved in the movement and Limmud, and are aware of

and enthusiastic about the varying models of service they experience. This is a factor quite absent in Newcastle, which is very insular and sends few people, if any, to conferences and other intersynagogal experiences.

Speaking for those who are fairly content with what is on offer, TM states that “I’m more open to more singing in the service than to replacing older melodies. But I do really enjoy the tunes. They are catchy, stay in your head. There is more singing at Sinai than Bradford [where he used to attend] and more chanting at the Orthodox *shul* than here. The tunes are different and you do need to know them before you can join in, although much of the Torah service is the same as Bradford, but otherwise, the tunes were very different. I don’t know why.”

As he moved from the Orthodox world to another Reform synagogue, he associates the melodies he has learned at Sinai with Sinai and therefore there is no loss for him of ‘traditional’ melodies.

CR, on the other hand, is very critical of the way Morris uses music. “It is deadly here. We do the same songs every week and, in some cases, Ian’s choice of song is the less attractive choice. Same *Lecha Dodi* every single week. The service is identical, the identical tunes, every single week, with the exception of *Ein Keloheinu*, when he sometimes does the Sephardi one.<sup>298</sup> Oh, and occasionally he does *Yigdal*<sup>299</sup> on a Shabbat morning.”

She spoke at length of a different experience which captured her interest: “We had an away weekend, and the view was widely expressed that we need more variety. He said he’d take it on board. He has taken it on board. And it stays on board. We had a guitar-led service done by someone else, with a couple of prayers led by Ian. It was an RSY service, more modern, with up-to-date tunes and a few not in the service. [she hummed them and they were, in fact, all prayers.] We sang *Shalom Rav*, *Barechu* with *lai de dai*, *Modeh Ani*, etc. The leader also added songs that she liked singing, like *Lo Yisa Goy*, *Od Yavo Shalom*, *Am Yisrael Chai*. These are modern in comparison to what Ian does, those old Germanic hymns.”

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<sup>298</sup> He never used that melody when I was present.

<sup>299</sup> *Yigdal* is traditionally the Friday night closing song.

The perception that this service is replete with ‘those old Germanic hymns’ is quite amazing, given the fact that Morris suppressed much of that music, that very little of that music is still sung at Sinai, and that which is preserved is limited to two melodies on Shabbat evening and morning, and the music of the Torah service. It was difficult to understand to what CR was referring, and is a result of a world in which there is little or no education about the pedigrees of the music sung.

CR was inspired by the weekend away, during which this Living Judaism synagogue implemented more of the suggested alterations in worship which arose from S2K:

At Wyedale there was more informality. We sat in a circle as opposed to rows, and had more of the feeling of a body of people than you have with rows. But even then, I suppose there was also something in the fact that we were away. But I do believe that it was the guitar and the songs that engaged people. The old songs that we do are rather dirge like. These would encourage much more participation across the generations. I think we would get more people, particularly young people because, except for those forced to be there, those under forty do not come. We even have the ludicrous scenario where the *cheder* kids come in for the procession stay for 10 minutes and go out when it ends, so unbearable is the service meant to be. It is not in any way young person friendly.

PB too stresses that the music at Sinai is “traditional, it doesn’t change. It stays the same, is familiar, comfortable, unadventurous. I grew up in another Reform synagogue and it sounds the same as when I grew up. Well, maybe if I think about it quite a bit is different, but so much is what I was used to. In my years here, the organ and choir have gone, but I don’t know about the music before that.” As I led the earlier music of Sinai and was acquainted with the subsequent musical inheritance, I know this perception to be inaccurate, and that the musical medley now being sung is of a later generation, with its mix of Lewandowski and Sulzer, and Klepper and Israeli music. Morris has unwittingly concocted a similar mix to that which Bellos espoused.

PB speaks, as others have, of two major musical changes:

The first was the *Mah Tov* change. We moved to the Danny Maseng tune, because he had been at Limmud and the Biennial and some members loved it. They did a session at the movement, so he came to Leeds to do a concert and a workshop. The melody stayed with some people, particularly the rabbi, so he pushed it through, not pushy, but, like the new *siddur*, it just started happening. That persisted for years, and is now our main tune. The other is *Ein Keloheinu*. Eighteen months ago, one member of the congregation heard it and liked it, went around getting people to know it and sing it, and the rabbi got on board. It probably helped that the words were in the *siddur* [the Ladino version], so it had ‘official’ backing, was a legitimate thing to do.<sup>300</sup>

We discussed the process of change that occurred over the introduction of the Maseng *Mah Tov*. “There were those who were interested in something more uplifting, something different. A core wanted a change, even far more than did get changed. Some of the old timers may have been disgruntled, but thought they could live with one change, as the rest would be ‘back to normal.’”

She is thoughtful about what musics work for her, and why. “One tune that annoys me is the quick *V’shamru*. It feels trivial next to what the words mean; it doesn’t fit the text. One that enhances because it creates a sense of peace is *Nishmat*, which is slow, peaceful, allows time to relax.” The ‘quick *V’shamru*’ would most likely need to be replaced with the old classic Lewandowski melody, as Sinai would most likely not know the other melodies available; *Nishmat* is one of the classic UK Reform melodies, written by former Alyth choir leader Sussman, as noted above. This perplexing inconsistency causes one to wonder what permeations and combinations of melodies could satisfy someone.

MT stresses the participatory element, a leitmotif that permeates much of modern Jewish liturgical music presentation.

## 5.6 The Future

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<sup>300</sup> I never heard Morris lead this melody, but of course, I am not there every week.

There most likely will be substantial changes in the services and its music, with the engagement late in 2013 of their former student, Rabbi Esther Hugenholtz. She is a self-declared singer-songwriter, is acquainted with a wide variety of music, and leads the vocal offerings in a semi-ecstatic manner, eyes closed, palm slapping in time against the reader's desk. She plays the guitar, although she does not read music (and therefore, cannot use the songbook to any extent.) It will be interesting to see how this unfolds.

## **5.7 Summary**

Sinai Synagogue represents an increasingly prevalent MRJ model of service performance. As the era of the synagogue choir winds down, the rabbi (or lay leader) assumes the dual responsibility of leading the musical and the verbal side of the services. This has some distinct advantages over the disparateness of leadership at WLS – the total affect of the service is here at Sinai Synagogue in the orbit of one person, who then can structure the whole, responding to moods and events both prior to and during the service.

Sinai's service achieves a flow, that is, there are fewer disjunctive moments during the service than at WLS and FRS, and the service proceeds through a cohesive body of prayers in appropriate sections, carried along by chanting and some singing. One can immerse oneself in it, and be carried along on a current of prayers and melodies, approximating more to the style of a traditional service.

In a proper traditional service, a great deal of independence for the congregation is assumed and vouchsafed, and they function to a great extent as a gathering of individuals who unite at certain junctures for songs and responses, but who otherwise sink into the service, intercalating their private lacunae and public participation.

This model, however, is difficult to replicate in Reform synagogues. It requires, as stated above, a very knowledgeable body of attendees who acquiesce to the style, which is absent at Sinai. People take advantage of the Sinai service to engage in a sort of meditative quiet participation, but without the whole shaped and led with expertise on both sides, without completely consecutive pages, and without concomitant responsiveness to the cues from Morris, one is somewhat bemused by the clash of styles. It is not a service to attend if one is



seeking drama or passion. It will not offer one a heightened sense of in-service communal bonding. And it will not offer a beautiful and proficient musical production. It is, however, a rather pleasant place to be on a Shabbat, with its aspect of spaciousness and its consistency of mood. It does not intrude on one very deeply, and this can be very welcome in a movement whose services are brimming full of commentary, instructions, and interruptions, and disjunctive leadership. But more needs to be done before rabbis head out to congregations where they will have the all-embracing responsibility for a service, and its smooth execution necessitates giving thought and time to service preparation a higher priority within the weekly workload.

## **CHAPTER SIX – FINCHLEY REFORM SYNAGOGUE**

### **6.1 The Building: Entering the Portals**

Finchley Reform Synagogue is the youngest of the three synagogues I have been studying. It was founded between 1956 and 1960, by a small group of Northwest Londoners meeting in homes in Woodside Park, and became affiliated with the Reform movement in 1962. They built their current premises in 1973.

FRS is situated within a suburban neighbourhood in Northwest London, surrounded by homes and a block of flats, and a short walk to the main artery through the borough, a ten-minute walk from the main shopping area.

The building itself is surrounded by a fence and occupies a corner lot. It is on two levels, a non-descript purpose-built structure set in a suburban neighbourhood. There is an annex on a single level attached to the building.

Because there is so little onsite parking available, people need to park throughout the residential area. It is often difficult to find a space, and one can understand the adverse reactions of the neighbours to the proposed expansion of the building. There are buses on the main road and two tube stations close by so it is easily accessible by a variety of means. The neighbourhood itself is middle-class and multicultural, with some Jews living in proximity. There is a Liberal Synagogue a short distance away, as well as Orthodox synagogues in the general area.

At the gate one is met by privately-hired security, Israeli or otherwise foreign. I am often simply greeted and not stopped, but when a new man appears, and if I am carrying a backpack, he will call me to be inspected. If one arrives prior to the security, the door may either be open, or one can buzz the doorbell for admission. Security is, then, rather more of a token than an actual deterrent.

One moves next through the gate into the small car park at the front. There are no trees, almost no vegetation, not a warm nor particularly attractive space and it is rather difficult to muster pre-*Shabbos* mind after dodging cars dislodging their passengers.

Inside, the building is a modern functional space and quite compact. To the right are stairs leading up to the offices. Under that are the toilets; sometimes on a Friday night, one can arrive for the service and find the custodian still cleaning said toilets or other parts of the building. In front is the multi-purpose room with the kitchen set off from it. To the left is the sanctuary, and at the end of that, access to the annex.

There are greeters at the entrance to the sanctuary, who wish you *Shabbat Shalom*, and hand you a *siddur* and a *Chumash*, as well as a ‘Daf’, a *Shabbat* newsletter. All three synagogues produce one each week, and they contain similar material, that is, page numbers for the Torah readings, and variously a study passage or the words to a song, notes about the service and the participants, and announcements about forthcoming events. Of the three congregations, this is the only one whose greeters actually hand out the books. In WLS, you help yourself, and at Sinai, the greeters are at the main door, monitoring the entrance and the CCTV and therefore, are there less to welcome you than to inspect you. Greeters are an integral aspect of the S2K agenda and it is interesting that Sinai, once a pilot synagogue for the British counterpart Living Judaism, does not allocate these roles.

The sanctuary space is light and airy, and the ark rather attractive, but it is rather a bland space. The seats are folding chairs which are easily moved to utilize the space as a multi-purpose room and also to vary the seating arrangements for the services.

Friday night and Shabbat morning are laid out differently. For the former, Rabbi Miriam Berger and Cantor Zoe Jacobs sit with their backs to the ark at the top of a series of concentric half circles, with the musicians – guitars, drums, etc. – seated to their left, next to Jacobs. There is a small table in front of the *shlichei tzibur*, who sit a token distance apart from the community; sometimes Shabbat candlesticks, wine and challah rest on it. On Shabbat morning, the chairs are laid out in rows facing somewhat inwards, so that the congregation faces each other, and the leaders stand at the back of the room, facing the congregation and the ark.

## **6.2. Summary of Leadership and Ethos**

FRS has had steady rabbinical leadership, all of whom were UK born unlike the rabbis of the other synagogues I am studying, although their website's historical record omits certain rabbis, interesting in and of itself. Their first rabbi was Henry Goldstein, from 1968 - 1973, followed by Jeffrey Newman in 1973. Jeffrey Newman, who, it would be accurate to say was the single strongest influence on the developing ethos of FRS, was interested in the idea of team ministry pioneered by Anglican churches and began to compile such teams within FRS itself, so, although he was the Senior, full-time, other rabbis held pieces of the work<sup>301</sup>. After his retirement, they employed Colin Eimer, rabbi of Southgate and District Reform Synagogue<sup>302</sup>, as senior rabbi of both synagogues, with a team under him at each one. This experiment went from 2002 – 2005, after which time, one of the FRS team, Lee Wax, became interim rabbi until the appointment in 2007 of Rabbis Roderick Young, and Miriam Berger<sup>303</sup>. When Young left in 2008, Berger was appointed sole rabbi. In 2010, they appointed Cantor Zoe Jacobs as Cantor and member of the clergy team, and Rabbi Howard Cooper<sup>304</sup> as Director of Spiritual Development, a rabbi who also functioned as one of the first rabbis on the team rabbinate.

## **6.3 The Synagogue and Its Music – Some Historical Background**

### **6.3.1 Founding the Synagogue**

Although one founder member quipped that FRS was founded because 'Alyth was full' another remarked that "FRS was founded to some extent but not entirely by people from YASGB [Youth of the Association of Synagogues of Great Britain]<sup>305</sup>. We used to say that

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<sup>301</sup> I was one of the rabbis on the first team with responsibility for the conversion programme.

<sup>302</sup> The synagogue is now known as Sha'arei Tzedek, and has shifted its centre to Barnet, within the catchment area of FRS.

<sup>303</sup> She married during her time at FRS, and now uses her husband's surname, Berger.

<sup>304</sup> Cooper was also one of the first team, and a long-time member of the synagogue.

<sup>305</sup> YASGB was, in its day, terribly important in developing strong Jewish commitment in its members, and many of the rabbis and lay leaders of the movement who are now in their 60s and 70s came through this very influential youth movement.

we didn't want synagogues like the other ones, with all the idealism of youth, we looked at them and said, 'this is not what we really need', although we didn't know entirely what we wanted. We did know that we wanted to address contemporary issues, the things of everyday life, and explore new issues."

Another early member, who later worked at the RSGB, recalled that "This was the first synagogue set up by YASGB and the RSGB didn't know what to make of us. We were much much younger, with ideas of our own. When we sent women to meetings of the Ladies Guilds, everyone from Finchley was pregnant. We heard about Oxfam, and digging wells from NP; it was all quite new; later we became involved in a commune based in Scotland.<sup>306</sup> Finchley was in the vanguard. We were certainly very different."

Thus, from its inception, FRS conceived of itself as special, with energy and creativity and an awareness of social issues perhaps missing elsewhere. The first rabbi, Goldstein concurs, and added "my task was to make it a bit more conventional."

This sense of FRS as in the vanguard asserts itself on the website where they report that Newman's qualities "...ensured that the synagogue became the cutting edge of Reform Judaism in the UK..." and this continues to echo whenever FRS begins a new project. One of their defining features is their pride in their distinctiveness and innovative boldness and it is indeed the case that their rabbis and members have instituted novel, unique, and highly original programming.<sup>307</sup> A fair number of FRS members have also been important in the life of the Reform Movement; the de facto current head of the Movement is a former chair of FRS, and their Cantor is a musical resource person for the Movement.

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<sup>306</sup> I was around during those years, having taught at the FRS religion school from 1976 – 1978, and then as a tenant of a house right next to the synagogue, from 1978 – 1981.

<sup>307</sup> Three times the website uses the descriptive "innovative" to describe aspects of life and programming at FRS. <http://www.frsonline.org/About/Ourhistory/>

### 6.3.2 A Musical History

FRS engaged the services of a chorister named Marion Kreindler, a powerful singer who proved very important in the musical beginnings of the *shul*. Early on, they distinguished between the mood of the Friday and that of the Shabbat morning services, with the style of music the indicator. Goldstein recalled that in the beginning, only two to five people would attend Friday night services, which were held in people's homes, and "as I could croon a bit" there was no need for the professional soloist. On Shabbat mornings, "I didn't have much to do with music, never expressed an opinion, I just left it to Kreindler. She sang the same music week in and week out. It was not a musical synagogue."

The first informal director of the choir, founder member SP, stated that one compelling reason she joined was because she had a good voice and a move to a Reform synagogue would allow her to sing.<sup>308</sup> She was approached as a locum singer when Kreindler was unable to attend, began to lead and add harmonies to professional Kreindler's melody lines, and recalls that, although others joined in, she and Kreindler were the primary singers<sup>309</sup>. When asked about their repertoire, she responded, "There was a list of the usual things that you sang that existed in a folder that you could get and copy if you needed."<sup>310</sup> Raymond [Goldman, then Executive Director of the ASGB] was in the background getting us music." The recollection of all involved is that the music was WLS music, funnelled through Alyth, but, as we have seen, the music of Alyth differed greatly from that of WLS, due to the influence of the later generations of immigrant German rabbis, and thus, we can establish that the German effect was seminal in the creation of the Reform musical canon, with Alyth as the disseminator in many instances. For all that it regarded itself as a maverick congregation; FRS was part of the greater Reform musical scene, as it learned much of its repertoire from the folders of the Music Committee and from two members of the choir at Alyth. Another concurred "At the outset, we were not particularly adventurous about music."

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<sup>308</sup> See above for discussion of *kol isha*.

<sup>309</sup> She states that Kreindler had an overloud voice, which corroborates NP's view that the lead singer was powerful.

<sup>310</sup> This would be the music compiled by the Music Committee under Librowicz.

As FRS grew, Kreindler and SP continued to lead the singing every Shabbat morning, with congregational participation. It was then decided to engage an organist, and they hired Miss Globber, a church organist, who played for them for five years. She was described as quiet and unassuming, but also competent and meticulous. From then on, they always had an accompanist for the services and it seems that here, tension began to mount concerning music. Recalls SP, “Our rabbis couldn’t sing. The business of cuing in the organist and liaising with her and the singers was fraught with uncertainty; I would say that their attitude towards singers was that they had to endure them. It was not that they didn’t want them, but it was a complication.”

It seems that the duet became a choir which grew very slowly over the first two or three decades to constitute four or five members, with the intent to lead the High Holy Days services. Much was made of the evolution of the High Holy Days choir, which is outside the purview of this thesis, but it is interesting that at Sinai, too, there was a recognition that choral help is necessary for the extended musical offerings of those days. Again, the help for learning this music came from Goldman and from Jerome Karet.

When Newman became the rabbi, the choir became a firm part of the service. Shabbat morning singing developed, and eventually a Shabbat choir was established, with five to seven people. SP conducted this little group, and took the rehearsals, although “members of the choir didn’t want to turn up every Shabbat, so it was a bit untidy.”

And here the tale of the choir changes its tenor. NP said that that music, or more accurately the choir, has “...always been an area of controversy. The choir was where there were problems, *broigases* [disagreement], people falling out with each other, but it was important and that is why there was so much tension.” To do adequate justice to the tale leading to the demise of the FRS choir, one would wish to write the stories with opposing columns, labelled He Said, She Said.

Newman supports this perception: “At my very first Council meeting, there was a *geschrei* [uproar] about the choir and music. The choir was unhappy, the congregation was unhappy. The expression of this unhappiness came from those leading; when they were unhappy, they could be difficult and the situation difficult.”

At some point, it was decided that FRS should have professional choir leaders, to rehearse, develop, and grow the choir. These were always Jewish, even if the accompanists generally were not. SP felt that none had the skill to hold together a happy group. “They became overzealous, strict; they were not the heart of our community, and not from our community. There was one we really liked – David Hart - who was a member of our *shul*, but he became ill and had to give it up.”

One of the last professional directors of the choir, Adam Harriman, seems to have had a particularly fraught time. Newman recalls that “He and the choir had a fiery relationship and it was an uncomfortable five years.” SP was more sympathetic: “FRS engaged this choir director, whose personality was difficult for some, but he had the support of the Rabbi and, more importantly, he showed Jeffrey that music counts. We tried to tell him that the music lifts the service, but the new director showed that the music was the soul of the service.” However, this appointment caused further tensions, as Newman championed him, and the choir was unhappy with him, many remaining in the choir solely out of loyalty to the synagogue. SP says that she doesn’t know how he managed to remain, as “the job must have been soul destroying for him.” TA, a past Chair of the synagogue, recounts that he “went to a choir rehearsal just before the High Holy Days. It was quite formal, the fairly traditional Lewandowski and Sulzer melodies.”

KK speaks of the next conductor “We then engaged one woman who was particularly good. She taught us little *niggunim*. We had never known about such things and the *shul* was not sure that they wanted this kind of thing. But slowly it came into being that it was acceptable to have some little hums.” The choir wasn’t growing, despite holding special evening events, inserting ads, and even producing a questionnaire about music<sup>311</sup>, but somehow, the situation remained tense and unresolved. One former choir member felt it was because the Council “hadn’t a clue about music and we couldn’t find someone to bring this essence of music right across the community.”

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<sup>311</sup> Led by Community Developer (another first) Dr Iris Kalka, who worked for them from 1981 – 1983.



Newman, despite his lack of personal musical ability, was aware of the power of music in a service and had a clear sense of the direction he did, and did not, wish for music to take at FRS:

One major thing that was an issue was participation. My main concern was whether the choir was there to provide pretty music or that plus to enable joining in. It was a fierce battle. The choir was unable or unwilling either to understand this, or to adopt a pitch for ordinary members to sing to. It wanted to harmonize, on behalf of, not with, the congregation. This was a big issue. Because I am not musical, which is major, I could not put it into words, and that was a very big problem. I do believe that when you sing, that is when you have a possibility of touching your own soul, that it is an expression of your innermost being. And when people can sing together, there is transformation for the individual and for the community.

Zoe Jacobs, who spent her childhood at FRS, concurs. She described it as “a ‘listen to us’ choir. There was a time when they didn’t know you could change the key. The key was the issue. It was not a high priority for them.”

One experiment that began early on was a further musical separation between Friday night and Shabbat morning. JM stated that “it wasn’t long before we wanted new instruments, guitars and all that, and not just an organ. We were the hippie generation!” Newman and others began a series of initiatives to increase attendance and particularly to engage the younger children. Music was one aspect of this change.

We made a big difference between Friday and Saturday, not deliberately at first, just that no one came on Friday, so I could do what I wanted. After Suzanne Lynn<sup>312</sup> came, things began to move. We created Friday Group<sup>313</sup>, so we would sing anything

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<sup>312</sup> Educational Director, responsible for the Friday Group idea.

<sup>313</sup> Friday Group is a truly innovative programme. Those who celebrated their *b’nei mitzvah* are paired with a pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah, whom they tutor on a Friday evening. Newman said that it was to combat the use of private tutors, but it is a major feature of FRS life and attracts a large percentage of the teens. It has a co-ordinator; I inhabited that role from 2006 – 2008. Many children remain afterwards for the services, sometimes joined by their parents.

to keep the kids who were staying on afterwards happy.<sup>314</sup> We introduced the RSY songbooks of Ian Wainer<sup>315</sup>, and used the sixties songs from the songbooks in the service, accompanied by guitars. We also did *Bim Bam*, whatever I could sing, some Psalms. That all developed so well, we then moved from the small hall to the big hall, and Friday night became the biggest service, I think because of the music.

FRS early on took up the mantle of retaining the young and used music as one way of attracting them, even at one point hiring a professional klezmer musician to run children's services. From 1996 to 1997, Nina Moreni was engaged as Musical Director. She had attended Hava Nashira, a song-leading institute run by the URJ [Union of Reform Judaism], the American Reform movement. She began bringing a guitar every Friday and was again very supportive of the involvement of young people in music. She involved many people as musicians and singers, organized a youth choir, and inspired, among others, Jacobs, who marks this as the era when she began to attend regularly and to lead some services.

Newman admitted that "From my perspective, it went too far, it became a singsong, which wasn't what I was looking for, but it resonated, people liked the buzz." The Shabbat morning service continued to be largely based on the compositions of Lewandowski, and virtually indistinguishable from the music of other RSGB synagogues.

However, Newman and the Council continued to remain unhappy about the production of music at FRS, and, in particular, the choir. "The choir was an obstacle. I wasn't against them, though they thought so. I just wanted to work with them." SP admits that there were reasons why the choir became unpopular. "It became a kind of performance at times. It needn't have been that way, but all depended on the conductor - many conductors didn't feel the pulse,

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<sup>314</sup> Not only did they use secular songs in their services, but during an experimental period in their religious school, they offered a class in country line dancing. They truly did whatever they could to maintain interest amongst the young, but so often, these were not Jewish offerings.

<sup>315</sup> These RSY songbooks were compiled for use at youth events, and reflected the taste and ages of the leadership – lots of Israeli songs and American folk-rock from the 60s (and 70s). I found it amusing at the time that the music of my generation had acquired a sort of holy status of its own and that children of a much younger age were passionate about the music I used to listen to when I was their age.

didn't understand the community. And then as well, when we would sing something new and didn't do it very well, it was painful for the community. Jeffrey began to be at loggerheads with us and we with him.”

Newman therefore instituted the idea of lead singers, a lay solo singer who would assist the leader of prayer, particularly he himself, a non-singer: “I brought that in because I knew that if we could have someone who could sing and at a pitch enabling joining in, we would begin to learn, we could teach the community the songs and how to sing. It was a necessary part of a process. We decided to allow the choir to sing at 2 out of the 4 weeks. The only difficulties arose around *B'nei Mitzvah*, that they would not have the choice if they were going to have the choir or not.”

Newman was pleased with the result. “We realized that we could carry the music without the choir, as in an Orthodox *shul*, something we hadn't been sure of. I was not raised Orthodox, but always thought this was a strength.” This marked the first time in my interviews that someone mentioned in a favourable manner the style of music in an Orthodox synagogue and stated that it functioned as an inspiration, although the kind of music they enjoyed at FRS was in no ways ‘traditional.’

SP offered the other perspective. “This development angered the choir<sup>316</sup> and caused angry relations between choir, its liaison people and the Council. There developed tremendous animosity between the choir and the Council. We felt that we weren't listened to, that the Council didn't care about us.” She surmised that the Council viewed the choir as a group of outsiders, who should simply turn up and sing and otherwise not interfere with the development of music at the synagogue. This perception led the congregation to ask the lead singers to do more, perhaps, the choir felt, as a prelude to getting rid of the choir, and so twice a month was cut to once a month. There was a feeling in the choir that Newman was “antipathetic to the growth and acceptance of music. He would get the order of service, and then would stick in something else, or read something we were trying to sing. He was known for this. We didn't feel respected by the rabbinate.”

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<sup>316</sup> At least one choir member was also a lead singer.

SP maintains that the choir was ‘innovative’ during these years. “All during that time, choir leaders would introduce new music; we collected a pile of alternative music that we could draw from. The choir leaders liaised with Viv, to look at the book with all the music.”

During Newman’s tenure, and in common with many synagogues, rabbis were inspired by the experiments in congregational renewal taking place in the USA, and, in particular, the writings of Rabbi Larry Hoffman. Hoffman recommended various changes in the service, to emphasize community, two of which were layout of *bimah* and chairs, and music. In keeping with this, Newman stated, “we moved the centre to a circular one, as an important gravitational pull. I had all sorts of excuses for doing this, one of which was that I didn’t want to face the community and pray at them, but rather, wanted to pray with them. Music was an aspect of the changes, but not the compelling driver of change.”

MP was an interesting case, in that she was both in the choir, and a critic thereof. She recalled that “it took me a long time to join, but I had certain beefs with the choir, so thought it better to work from the inside. I succeeded to get them to drop one tune: Danny Maseng said the music has to fit the prayer, not the prayer the music. Also, the choir used to stand up for everything. I got them to sit when people in the *shul* sat; it was much less intrusive.”

We can see from the above the enormous impact the American musical revival movement was starting to having on FRS, partly because Newman was always interested in the novel, and therefore, encouraged participation in whatever alternatives were available, and partly because the RSGB too began to knit tighter connections between Reform in the UK and Reform in America. Limmud was another venue for exposure – it was indeed at Limmud that so many people learned Maseng’s famous *Mah Tov* when he was in residence at the conference.

It is well to dwell for a moment on Limmud, as it sums up so much of the British Jewish *weltanschauung*. Limmud was founded in 1980 – I attended the first conference - by British Jews who attended the American educational conference CAJE<sup>317</sup> [Conference for Alternatives in Jewish Education], established in 1976 and, as is often the situation, wished to establish a similar experience and spirit back in England. Both began as opportunities for

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<sup>317</sup> I attended two CAJE conferences. An active member of FRS was there both times.

Jewish educators to increase their Jewish knowledge but both began to develop into something akin to the *kallot* that were organized during Babylonian times, space in time, a grand week's shabbaton, during which Jews could immerse themselves in Jewish learning, culture and celebration. And what emerged from Limmud, despite the propensity for British Jewish self-flagellation, was an event that has become the defining experience for many British Jews ("I'm a Limmud Jew"), has replaced the kinds of experiences that used to engage the very people who founded FRS, the YASGB conferences, in stimulating Jewish involvement and experimentation, and has, since 2002, become an international idea, ironically even in the States (CAJE itself went bankrupt in) where the first Limmud conference was held in 2005.

Limmud brought to the UK prominent American (and Israeli) Jewish scholars and musicians, and this is the beginning of the shift from the UK choral tradition and the Israeli pop music and *zemirot* tradition, to the American liturgical phase of Debbie Friedman, Danny Maseng, et al. And that is not to say that there were not already American melodies floating about in the UK synagogues. Melodies by Cantor Jeff Klepper, *Shalom Rav* in particular, were popular throughout the eighties, but as a sometimes contentious addition to the choral repertoire of the UK. As described in the chapter on Sinai Synagogue, Maseng's concert at Limmud introduced the new *Mah Tov*, a rather more problematic addition than *Shalom Rav*, which was not a prayer sung in UK Reform synagogues. It was an addition which may have injected an alien style into Reform synagogues that was perceived by some as disruptive but it did not otherwise replace a cherished melody. *Mah Tov* altered the standard Lewandowski melodies that united so many British Jewish congregations, and marked a new phase – in place of addition there came replacement, and the beginnings of the contemporary conflict over music in the British Reform world.

The British Jewish self-abnegatory streak leads it to look elsewhere to solve problems that perhaps do not really exist. The ironic aspect is that far more progressive British Jews affiliate with, and attend, synagogue services than in the USA, a fact highlighted in the Jewish Chronicle where a report stated that, the results of a poll indicated that two-thirds of American Jews do not belong to a synagogue<sup>318</sup> whereas in the UK two-thirds do join.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Rosa Doherty, "We're losing our religion: shock American survey." *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 Oct 2013, ' 3

After Newman's retirement in 2000, only one of the intervening rabbis, Lee Wax, was musical and was perceived of as friendly to the choir. Despite that, KK feels that again, "nothing happened really to grow the choir, although a few new people joined." She felt that, whatever else was thought, one aspect that was never acknowledged was that "this little group sang with enormous heart. It was so so frustrating. On one hand, we were being fulfilled, because we were singing with heart, and on other hand, we felt disconnected. People would argue about where the choir should sit - in corner, at the back, or within the community. They were always pushing the choir around. They were never happy, labelling what we did as a performance. But we sang with heart and we sang beautifully also. Their attitude was typical of an odious ignorance about the value of music."

This is a poignant commentary on the tension within communities about musical production, of which there are different models within the MRJ. There is the professional choir, now only represented by WLS. There are synagogue choirs, some directed by a professional musician, some by a volunteer from the community; some sing at all services, some sing intermittently. The rest are led by the rabbi or the lay leader of that Shabbat, sometimes accompanied by musician/s, voluntary or otherwise, who may also offer vocal support. Attempts to encourage communal engagement used to revolve around *shul* choirs, whose members would attend thus demonstrating commitment to the services and representing a participatory expansion on the single voice-led service. Allowing for opportunities for participation has been a consistent theme throughout the history of the movement, but the contemporary focus is one of full participation in all aspects of the music, which a choir is seen now to disrupt. The FRS members who joined the choir to offer their vocal ability to enhance the services, particularly in the absence of capable vocalist rabbis, represented a regular corps of devoted attendees whose contribution was now regarded, not only as superfluous, but as an impediment to involvement of the whole. Similar sentiments were expressed by former choir members at Sinai Synagogue; yet, as we saw from reactions both to the professional choir of WLS and the congregational choir at FRS, musical expertise is now expected to radiate out to encompass not just the pulpit, not just the choir, but the whole congregation. This is the new

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<sup>319</sup> <http://www.bod.org.uk/content/SynagogueMembership2010.pdf>, 4.

emphasis on music in the movement, the democratizing of musical production – but not necessarily of musical expertise.

TA filled in some further details, from the point of the Council, which she joined in 2003. “I saw the wider community picture, and I am an educational psychologist, so that helped me to understand. I was involved in the process of finding and appointing a new Music Director. We hired Idit Gold, who had been at New North London.<sup>320</sup> Some peculiar things happened quite quickly – suddenly the choir sang two times a month. Was that because not everyone was comfortable? How was the decision made? Did Idit say that to improve the quality, they needed to sing more often, and rehearse more often, and it happened? So there was tension, because no clear decision had been made, and it was not necessarily what the congregation wanted or had decided for.”

FRS, the self-consciously consultative congregation seemed not to be able to do this well when it came to their music.

She elaborated on the further complicating issues:

We had a conductor, a prompter and an accompanist. It was quite complicated. And the choir was made up of those who had been involved for many years for the most part, people who had already been singing for twenty years. I was the only new one. It was very established, they knew their stuff, some good, some ‘tryers’. In 2005, we went to the Czech Republic for concerts and services. There was a great excitement and buzz. Absolutely marvellous. There was quite a crowd, and some joined us from outside the *shul*. So Idit got the choir to a place that it hadn’t been in some time. It had been leaderless for awhile, had had no direction, no position in *shul*.

Gold was named as Director of Music, but, according to TA “the choir is what she did really. Things were not clear really, with hindsight. I don’t know if she was given the direction by the *shul* leadership that she needed, maybe because of her professional background. Choir was her background so she thought that is what she was brought in to do. To manage the

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<sup>320</sup> NNL is a Masorti synagogue, with a traditional liturgy *davenned* with *nusach*.

music of the Choir and High Holy Days was important, but she didn't manage to get beyond that. And although she brought things to a new high, that was about as good as it got."

Gold, in much the same way as Bellos in Alyth, expanded the choir, so that it became a performing choir, but roiling frustrations caused further divisions, perhaps with Gold as a scapegoat. FRS, ever on a journey, seemed not to know what they wanted in the choir, which now appeared to be split between a professional who, although Jewish, was not religious and concentrated on other types of choral proficiency; not surprisingly "there were always tensions and unrealistic expectations," reported TA.

The idea that she could have transformed the choir and taken it into a different direction was unreasonable. She herself, although from a rich and deep musical background, whose dad was a cantor, did not have a feel for the liturgy and the religious aspect and that was quite difficult. To manage to do what she was doing and more would have needed more time, more resources, more support, but even then she was not necessarily the one to take the choir to another place. Too much of what happened was just not her fault. She felt she was being summoned, when asked to give a report, that there was a challenge there, and that she was not being allowed to get one with business of making music.

Although guitars were now firmly ensconced in the Friday service, the next battle was around the harmonium; so many of the melees at FRS remind one of the similar struggles over choir and harmonium at Sinai. Even in synagogues that maintain choirs, alternative instrumental accompaniment is sometimes sought, however, the organ or harmonium, for others, has become for some the consummate Jewish musical instrument for use in services. And as such, its use or absences provides another flashpoint.

TA continued. "The organ was a symbol of the tension between tradition and modernity, the choir and the lead singers. So we decided to remove the organ, and replaced with an electric piano, which was just a cosmetic change."

The demise of the choir seemed to be inevitable. TA recalled that "Things did get worse, actually. There was a lot of tension in the later years. It almost felt that the choir was being marked on how well it did, on things like the quality of the voices, their coming in at the



wrong time, etc. It was unbalanced, and hard to gauge the wider community feeling, but the regulars had strong feelings about it. And so, the mood had swung. We felt that we need to get past all of that angst and make things work in a different and better way.”

I asked TA whether, had the choir been a good one, there might have been a different story, in other words, was the tension over the quality of the music, or did it represent some other agitation at FRS. “Maybe slightly different, but there had been developing a different idea of where we wanted to go musically. Here music is a big thing, it fires people’s emotions, people discuss how good it is, what it does in services. We needed a whole sea change. This is what we finally perceived, but it took a long time to get to the situation we are now in.”

One of the last efforts, during the Gold years, was to bring the LSG choir together with the regular choir. TA, then Chair of the synagogue, was both a lead singer and a choir member and was instrumental in the decision to disband the group:

Idit rehearsed us, but separately. We wanted to get both groups together to agree a common list of music, especially for the High Holy Days, so that there could be flexibility and interchange and an understanding that we needed to work together for everyone’s mutual benefit. There was not much movement, though. The difficult position that led to what killed the choir was whether or not we could move things on. And we had objections to both the quality of the choir and the type of music sung. The choir did bring in new music, but some of that would have been terribly inappropriate. FRS is a place where people like to join in and participate. Some pieces were appropriate for a concert, but not for an unsuspecting congregation. And Idit didn’t have a good way of exposing them to new music. She did try things out - the Danny Maseng’s *Mah Tov*, for example. But some of the modern music didn’t need the choir to sing; we felt you could do that with leader, with a song leader, who could get everyone to join in.

Miriam, Idit and I had frank conversations. Idit said ‘I don’t think I can do anything more with choir as it is.’ There are lots of ways to interpret that. But still there were lots of feelings about the choir and so I said that it was time to do something radical, to draw a line under where we are. I spent time with the regulars, discussing why we

got to this point, and the conclusion that we had reached. I sold it as putting choir's work on hold until we could get some leadership and get it back on track. And maybe, because they were friends of mine, I had sung for eight years with them, maybe that made it easier to deliver bad news. I let them know that this was a stage in getting music to turn around and that it couldn't under the current arrangement. There were also personal tensions. So the choir went.

And thus it was finally disbanded. Having attended many services prior to beginning my PhD, I would regard the choir as having been out of tune and difficult to engage with at that point, although during earlier years of association, it was indeed a better choir. I remember well the Shabbat that it ceased, 12 January, 2008. That Shabbat, there was great bewilderment, much curiosity, and a mix of opinions from the positive to the positively negative. Despite TA's recollection of wide-ranging discussions, and the announcement on the previous Shabbat that the next one was the last for the choir, the choir ceased during the holiday break, when Friday Group was not meeting, and there were fewer in attendance. That Shabbat, there was much speculation and tumult, as many of us were unaware of the tensions underpinning the decision.

At this point, the idea of having a cantor began to assume importance. People had been learning about the liturgical music scene in America, and exploring different models of music leadership. When asked whether the fact that Jacobs, a member of FRS, was training to be a cantor influenced the decision TA replied that she was mentioned, but was not a catalyst for the change. From then until 2009, the Lead Singers facilitated the musical side of the services. Various strands concerning empowerment and congregational involvement, a penchant for novelty, and the experiences of proto-cantorial soloists led FRS to what seemed the next inevitable step, a cantor.

Berger is, by her own account, not particularly musical – “I never sit and listen to music” and cannot sing, but nonetheless, as with Newman, has engaged in metacognitive consideration of the place of music in the *shul*. She remembers when the songs they sang were such as “‘Losing my Religion’ and ‘Purple Rain’ – these were the songs that people knew. The teenagers led them because this was what they liked.” Her sense of music there was that it was “more about the atmosphere, then the words. There was no connect between the songs we sang and what we were there for.”

She dates the shift in the functional use of music at FRS from 2005, when “they began to use the songbooks less and the *siddur* more.” The decision was to adhere to the performative style, but change the context: “We wanted to keep the guitars and the informal style, using easy to follow joyous music but which were liturgical, rather than any old song.”

She was involved in the final discussions about the choir. “The choir was an agenda item on every ritual agenda. They loved singing, but it was painful. They were not on every week and this caused problems with *B’nei Mitzvah* families who [contrary to what the choir believed] then didn’t want a bar or bat mitzvah on a choir weekend.” She added, “They wanted to give community a formality they didn’t want or appreciate,” She was also dismayed at another aspect of disconnect, this time emanating from the choir leader of the day: “Gold was not Jewishly literate and not sensitive to the rest of the service. You might announce a suicide bomb, then get a rousing piece. She was not attuned to what was going on, to what was needed. ‘This is what we do’, whether it was appropriate or not.”

Berger, as Newman, had been introduced to the ideas emanating from the USA, and she was purposeful about the function of music in the synagogue. She quoted an often alluded to comment by Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman<sup>321</sup>, to the effect that prayer is like jazz. She didn’t quote the whole statement to me, so it was unclear whether she thought I might know it anyway, or even that she had picked up a piece of the concept, and was unmoved by the rest.<sup>322</sup> In fact, the analogy to jazz as posited by Weiman-Kelman, could equally apply to any group music-making experience. The key point about jazz is its experimental and unscripted nature. FRS, musically, is only somewhat experimental and is not particularly unscripted, as we shall see.

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<sup>321</sup> Weiman-Kelman is an American rabbi who founded the progressive synagogue Kol Haneshama in Jerusalem. In 1988, Newman conceived of a novel way of becoming involved with Israel, by twinning FRS Kol Haneshama, and including Weiman-Kelman as a member of our team rabbinate. He did come and participate in meetings, and people visited his synagogue when in Israel, so he has had an influence on the development of religious life at FRS.

<sup>322</sup> [http://www.kbyonline.org/kol\\_haneshama/](http://www.kbyonline.org/kol_haneshama/).

Near the end, Berger assessed the total situation. Berger's overview of the musical situation was that "FRS was incredibly keen and loved music, but they were not very capable. So we tried to keep it simple but also we did what we knew. We used Lewandowski and Debbie Friedman, because that's all they knew."

FRS found itself divested of its choir, with another rabbi who understood the place of music in the service, but was incapable of leading the singing nor had had the training in musical leadership that FRS seemed to require, and as well, worked in a synagogue that, as noted, preferred a diversity of input from a multiplicity of sources. And thus, they turned to the idea of a cantor, and to daughter of the congregation Jacobs, completing her studies at HUC in New York, who was, at that time, being courted by WLS, as well as by the leadership of the movement:

Shoshana [Boyd-Gelfand]<sup>323</sup> had met me at the Biennial<sup>324</sup> and felt there was an interest here in having me return.<sup>325</sup> Then Mark Winer offered me an internship, and I worked at WLS for the whole summer. I was on a *bimah* where you could not expect people to sing – it was a different type of congregation altogether. I have never experienced professionalized beautiful music before. And since the only pieces done without the choir were the *Avot v'Imahot*, and the *Aleinu*, and the rabbis were capable of leading those, I wondered why they needed to have me there. They were trying to get the congregation used to a cantor singing with a choir<sup>326</sup> and therefore, I was sent to people's homes for a sort of salon, to teach new music. WLS proposed that I work 50% for them and 50% for the Movement, but I didn't want to do that. I felt it needed

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<sup>323</sup> Then Deputy Executive Director of the MRJ.

<sup>324</sup> The biennial conference of the URJ, which, increasingly, MRJ rabbis and lay leaders were attending.

<sup>325</sup> As we have noted, there are often difficulties in engaging clergy altogether in the UK, much less agreeing to pay the salary of a *chazan*. However, an invested cantor – and they are now going to use the word ordained, which underscores the following idea – is a clergy person, and can perform many of the aspects of rabbinical pastoral work. Nevertheless, it is always a possibility that someone will choose to remain in the USA, where there is more possibility for work.

<sup>326</sup> Again, that is a very common North American model.

someone with more experience. Meanwhile, FRS was going to hire a musical director and educator, and an assistant rabbi, and I went to them and asked if they would be prepared to have a cantor take those two roles, the music and the assistant rabbi. And it worked, as they like being on the cutting edge!

### **6.3.3 Enter the Cantor**

And thus, in 2009, appointed Jacobs to the role of Cantor at FRS. The daughter of active members, she travelled to the USA to study for the cantorate at HUC, solidifying the FRS musical connection to American musical trends. It is claimed on the website that she is the “first Reform cantor in the UK;” it would be more accurate to say that she is the first cantor in the UK Reform world who has been trained as a Reform cantor and returned to work in the UK. It is illustrative of the FRS approach that this needs to be framed as a startlingly original step, in addition to the potential this appointment had to offer.

RR, the next Chair of FRS, was key in getting Jacobs to come work there, because, as he said, “our music was in a terrible place. Friday felt tired and dirgey, and the choir was a joke – people laughed. They couldn’t join in. First they stopped being there every week, then they were poor and even awful. That cannot lead you to a spiritual level.” I queried his opinions concerning Friday night, as the Friday evening music was led by a group of keen guitarists. “Still, we needed a kick up the backside. We needed direction.” He was generous in his assessment of the possibility of a rump choir sometimes adding to the musical melange: “There are some lovely people in that choir, and with help, they can learn to sing. It doesn’t have to be in services; they can sing other stuff. They just need to be held.”

In what one could characterize as a typical example of the FRS method of decision-making, Jacobs’s appointment was preceded by an elaborate series of deliberations, some of which precipitated by what were perceived by some as odd and random appointments of rabbis. The concept of clergy teams was championed by Newman, an idea inspired both by large American synagogues and experiments in the Anglican Church. FRS had had a team of rabbis with responsibility for small pieces of work, from 1989 – 2010<sup>327</sup>, when they engaged Berger and another rabbi, Roderick Young. When Young left, TA reported that:

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<sup>327</sup> I worked there from 1989 – 1990.

We completely reviewed what the professional team would look like. We didn't have only one view in mind. We knew there were a number of possibilities, so we created two or three different models to construct our team and address our requirements. Ritual, education, and music were the main aspects of the team we wanted to create. We engaged in a rigorous process to get to the pieces right. We had some discussions about the nature of the music, but sometimes it's about what you don't want as much as what you do want. When you get the right people who are going to go in the direction you want to be going, you take their professional expertise with great deal of respect and belief. There was a practical desire to generate a culture of music within the synagogue that was not just about liturgical music, although that would be a large part of it, but also, musical literacy for the kids and the enrichment of the whole of the community's life. We also knew Zoe was coming with much of the training of the rabbi and the understanding of the liturgical, ritual, and theological aspects of a service, and that was really very important.

This rigorous process, which helped to continue the deepening consciousness about the form and function of liturgical music, the lacunae left by the demise of the choir, and the experiment in the lead singer format, a presage of the rabbi – cantor style of service, led to this decision.

There is a certain interest here in regarding once more the function of a cantor. For one, they are clergy, and therefore, can constitute part of a clergy team at a synagogue, in which they would visit the sick, counsel a bereaved person, and be party to the general religious-spiritual leadership direction of a synagogue. For another, they function to teach Judaism, with a specialty in the teaching of the musical tools of chanting the Torah, or the *nusach* or melodies needed to lead a service. They would also either lead a service, whether festival, Shabbat, wedding, or funeral, either in addition to a *shatz* who may or may not be the rabbi, and have particular responsibility for the musical content of such services.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> In the case of WLS and Sinai, there are rabbis who feel they can sing and are also interested, to one degree or another, in the music, whereas at FRS, the rabbi is incapable of leading the singing. Interesting questions arise about the relationship between a singing rabbi and a cantor. In such a circumstance, my cantor and I shared the service rather more equally, but she left me to prepare and chant the Torah portion; in other synagogues this would have certainly been her role. There is much documented tension between cantors and rabbis, some

One unique aspect of the cantorial role is to hold the responsibility for the musico-spiritual development of the synagogue, but, in addition to bringing in Jacobs, the synagogue engaged Rabbi Howard Cooper, a long-time member and formerly one of the FRS Rabbinic Team, as Director of Spiritual Development.

Cooper himself leads services in which music is fairly absent, and is known for a forceful sermon against musical change that he declined to share with me. I did garner some ideas about his views through speaking to some who attend the alternative service he leads. He and certain others share some of the same perspectives Magonet expressed, that an overly musical service militates against the spiritual potential in a service particularly when that music is lively in tone. And this seems not simply to be a matter of music, but also, a connection to the fast dissipating idea that a service is an act of ‘divine worship,’ that should be solemn and dignified. And English. Reactions to spiritual events derive from the character and predilections of the people who hold them, and remind us yet again that there are many valid and significant approaches to the content of a Shabbat service. It is to FRS’s credit that, despite critical dissension, Cooper is attended to with respect and accorded space for that which is more meaningful to him and others of similar taste.

It would seem then that Jacobs and Cooper hold, with Berger, nuanced types of roles regarding the religio-spiritual aspect of the synagogue. This gives a hint of either a problematization, or a realization – either music is the singular way to drive spiritual engagement at a synagogue, or it is not. FRS seems to be covering both bases, but with a definite bias in favour of music. ZJ works essentially full-time, whereas Cooper works for only a few hours a week.

## **6.4 Music and Liturgical Decision Making**

If WLS emphasizes musical historical continuity, which it regards almost as a sacred obligation, and Sinai Synagogue emphasizes the informal amalgamation of service-taking leadership roles, FRS emphasizes fluidity and transformation. Allied to this, each

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of which revolve around these issues, and some to do with the problematic of power and domination.

congregation has a particular decision-making style. WLS is a highly stratified, fairly hierarchical congregation, as demonstrated in the crescendo of rabbinical titles, a synagogue wherein many people's voices are heard, but final decisions are held either by one committee or by the designated expert. It is, as well, the largest synagogue in the movement, thus necessitating a specialized process for decisions. What to sing at a particular Shabbat service was decided by the musical professional, overseen by the wardens and the ritual committee, with some delimited input from the rabbis.

Sinai Synagogue was the most informal, the one in which the rabbi had authority, including the right to consult or not, or to incorporate suggestions or not. What to sing at any service, melody, range, tempo, was entirely the purview of the rabbi or lay leader.

FRS works by consensus and diffuse democratic processes, in which all decisions are, at least, thrashed out between stake-holders, in iterative and discursive processes. Jacobs borrows from Schiller's typology to explain: "The Music of Meeting is the most significant here, because I think that is the way the community operates. Everything they do is about meeting. They are not interested in one person being the significant voice in anything, not the most outstanding educator or rabbi, but want those who can bring community, and empower more people. This is a community that likes to empower, to allow them to connect to each other and be a participant."

This is echoed in an off-hand critical comment of Berger's concerning the pre-Jacobs Friday night guitarists – "They were loving their moment to shine." Shining, ego, is not highly valued at FRS.

This explains, in many ways, their various rabbinical and choir leader difficulties in the past. One rabbi was noted as having too strong a personality, evinced by wishing to have a clearer, more overt leadership role; it was asserted that the match didn't succeed because of an inability to work in "the Finchley style."<sup>329</sup> To work in the 'Finchley manner' is to understand that no one person's views will predominate and that all things, from the most minute through

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<sup>329</sup> I worked there again, from 2006 – 2008, with responsibility for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah children and GCSE students, but all decisions were worked out cooperatively, in meetings with rabbi, Head of Education, youth worker, and me.



the most important, are seen as significant and are to be drawn into a process, and that it is process that dominates at FRS.

FRS has various subjects of musical performance, each involving various people, and attempts to mediate between individual preferences, the perceived desire of the congregation, the Lead Singers, the Choir, the Friday night singers, the cantor, the rabbi, and, as well, the leadership of the congregation, which has a designated Music Committee.

How are musical decisions reached in this rather complicated setting? This question was answered by the above leadership in macro, not micro, terms. Berger suggested that she and Jacobs have a conversation, and others stated that they, as either the leader of prayer, or the LS speak about what they want. Interestingly, TA feels that it is all much simpler now, that “maybe we have moved a bit beyond the intense FRS process. When you see the outcomes that you might want anyway, you do not worry so much about the process.” Although she feels the process is simpler, the consultative process is “more rigorous. One has to carefully consider the mood or the time of the year before choosing a piece of music from the singer’s repertoire.”

Despite her sense that things are simpler, the “intense FRS process” does continue within the confines of the Music Committee. MCP, a Chair of this committee, described its purpose. “This was something Zoe said she would very much like. If you focus too much of the musical life around one person, you might deskill or alienate the others, or make them feel that they cannot get involvement, that the music is provided for them.”

Echoing other such statements, FRS resembles a grand experiment in constructivism and seems to stem from the socio-political convictions of its founders. It is also part of a self-conscious and self-aware attempt to continue to create and re-create that ‘innovative’ community that is so firmly a part of their ethos.

MCP spoke also of the need to support Jacobs, in what might be seen as an ideal manner in which to facilitate change – the professional/lay partnership of voices: “We thought of ourselves as a kind of editorial committee – what music we want, what we feel, where Friday night should be going. And then, we turned to the communal part, to make music more integral, involving the youth leadership, the kindergarten, the older people. If we think music

could be integrated into those groups, then we needed to know how and who, because Zoe cannot do it all. So, yes, we are an editorial, a sounding, board, a way of Zoe getting feedback, and then of getting people to do things and providing support for that.”

That does not mean that this is a committee devoid of the sorts of tensions inherent in all such groups, but writ large in the history of FRS. “A group, many of whom are passionate about music, some long-timers, everyone comes with their own baggage and desires. So we steer clear of letting people soapbox. We knew we had some issues around Fridays, when Zoe isn’t there, in a service that relies on there being accompaniment. People in the community were not feeling they could join in and the leaders were a bit detached. And then there is the problem of the *B’nei Mitzvah* and their choices, so the services can be rather same-y. ‘I want all of my favourites and my friends’ favourites’ – so the people who come every week end up coming to the same service every week.”

MCP encircles the crucial point – “everyone comes with their own baggage and desire.” WLS does not really acknowledge that; retaining the musical architecture of the past is regarded mostly as an sacred obligation, and change is a necessity because this will bring the young in. Sinai evinces little interest in the idea that there are polymorphic understandings about the nature of a service, and the rabbis will continue to determine the shape and momentum of what happens there. FRS will allow a swirl of opinions, seemingly even to the decision about specific melodies and the tempi in which they are intoned. It is not surprising that there is more overt rebelliousness in such a system, but also not surprising that FRS is able to metamorphose and regenerate in creative ways. There are, as well, many other *shul* options within a fairly short radius, so, those who join FRS connect to it positively, as a matter of true choice.

## **6.5 The Services**

### **6.5.1 Shaping the Services**

One notes from the above that diversity is much desired at FRS – it is rather anathema to come “to the same service every week.” This is a common theme throughout the movement now, a focus on variety, which Jacobs explains as giving people the tools to make wider choices, albeit appropriate ones. But variety is not what everyone seeks; some attend services

seeking the enduring, and do not wish to alter their standard, ‘traditional’ melody. FRS needed to promote calm change, as described by MCP:

We needed more structure. Zoe brought a lot of new music that everyone was excited about and enjoyed, whilst the change was done at a very slow pace, so the baby was not thrown out with the bathwater, so that the infrequent attendees wouldn’t start to feel they didn’t recognize anything. We wanted new things and yet for people to feel comfortable. It was discussed, then we sent Zoe and Miriam off to discuss this, and then we developed a structure - within the service, there would be a fairly structured pattern to every service, and within each section, there would be two or three options, and you could cycle round those. Every so often, something new could be brought in. If something was changed from last week, then you were not to change something else. This means that some new things have disappeared, or are on a back shelf, to be pulled in for a treat, but also that some of the old repetitious stuff is not sung every week.

We shall later see whether this was successful, or not, but it does presage the difficulties inherent in shifting the culture of an institution. “So, we had an awareness not to do too much too soon, and too much at the same time and yet, to ensure the service was not the same all the time. But it’s hard.” The need for a wide repertoire and variation in the service is sometimes predominant, whilst at other times, that isn’t what is valued, and there is a concern about the pace of change

Whereas at WLS, the sense of heritage is palpable, acknowledged even by those who find the music quite deadly and uninspiring, and whereas at Sinai there is a sense of nostalgia for the choir of bygone days, but little clamour for different music, at FRS, the tensions still simmer and still present challenges. This is due partly to the fact the members of the choir still harbour resentments, but as well because space has been made for dissension, as noted above. It is as well that there is a committee, so that any anger or disappointment is dissipated amongst many, and not focused on cantor and rabbi. It is clear that the increased pace of change here has been assisted by the presence of a cantor, but also, by a route that legitimizes and responds to change-pain.

Jacobs in many respects developed her love of music and music making at FRS, as a child of the congregation. She understood the refrain concerning music at FRS: “Gold wanted to make the music as beautiful as could be, but FRS did not care. They wanted to participate. If people can participate, they are happy. If they cannot, they are not happy. FRS is different, because they want to be brought in, want to be part of the conversation musically, liturgically. That is want is different. And it meshes with what I want to do.”

The meta-concept mentioned above was born out of Jacobs’s liturgical music proficiency. She elaborated on what she is teaching the congregation:

What am I trying to create? I have a job facilitating the music of the community in a way that will be most helpful. I am trying to create a community with a wide repertoire. If you have a wide repertoire, you can choose music that is appropriate for the time of the year, the world, the day of the week, the life of the *shul*. If all you have is *Mizmor Shir*, there is no way to make it anything other than naff pop. The more flexibility there is, the more you can choose based on knowledge, not just no choice. I am trying to get the community to make those choices based on knowledge. And I am trying to teach other lay leaders to be knowledgeable. I want to create a strong base of lay singers. I am educating the choir. I have a mission to give the choir a good name, rather than, ‘Oh, it’s the choir.’ What you have is a group of people passionate about Judaism and music, and you give them the ability to co-lead. It creates more beauty - beauty is a part of it 100%. You cannot move people if you don’t create beautiful music But not the usual pieces in four-part harmony. It’s not to say that that isn’t beautiful, but that is not FRS’s strength.

FRS presents a qualitatively different model from the others. If WLS is characterized by its mission to present beautiful music in a highly proficient manner, and Sinai Synagogue is about the individual rabbi and what music he or she knows and can bring in to accompany a somewhat traditional Reform service, and if both synagogues make their musical choices from within these confined processes, a decision for each individual Shabbat, FRS, under Jacobs’s guidance, has developed a macro-concept of music- making into which musical choices for each individual Shabbat are slotted. In other words, the global concept has established the framework, and individual Shabbat choices are then made within the context of the whole. And because she has widened their repertoire, there is much to choose from.

The unique potential within musical exposition, she states, is why she chose the cantorate, and not the rabbinate: “For me, music is everything. Without it, you cannot connect. While I appreciate a fantastic sermon, good teaching, appropriate *kavvanot* [aides to devotion], without music, I cannot enter it. Music can act as the wings that carry me through the service. Music is partly there to carry the people through the service. If thought through carefully, it can carry the service. In the congregation, music can be a mood changer; it can completely turn around and shift what is going on for them. If they had a bad week, joyous music can bring them out, give them an hour of enjoyment.”

Berger, although ‘non-musical’ is perhaps even more expansive about the development of a FRS musical meta-concept. “To me, there needs to be sensitivity to the words of the liturgy and sensitivity to congregational needs, to what they are going through at the moment. This is an important way to the access of the prayers. The music can take you on the journey. When the music is inappropriate, you cannot take people on a journey.”

Berger credits her deeper understanding to the accession of Jacobs, because, as she put it, she had “a wealth of knowledge and no musical ability. Zoe has taught me a lot. She brought in the four Ms and the community has stopped saying, ‘I like this, I don’t like that.’ That was about a personal preference, but it doesn’t help with the rest. They would feel that even if a tune was twee, ‘but it was my childhood one’. Zoe gave them the language of ‘that melody conveys the Majesty, that one Meeting,’ etc. And now they understand why they choose what they do.”

When she returns to her childhood synagogue, with its strong congregational choir under the leadership of the influential Bellos, she says “I find I have taken a step backwards. It’s not spiritually moving, and though I like to *qvell* over my niece and nephew when they sing a solo in the children’s choir, I hate it when the congregation stops because there is a child solo. At FRS they all join in.”

Having appreciated from exposure to the USA synagogue renewal projects something about music and its place in this revitalization, and with a broad exposure to the diversity of liturgical music, and Berger’s critical reflections concerning the ‘synagogue down the road’ with whom there is perhaps direct competition, she is able to be a partner with Jacobs in framing and developing her vision. “Choices about music are made “in conversation with

Zoe. We know that there is a place we want to get to. We're not there yet; it's a long process from here to what we want."

That is not to say that there are no longer extra-musical considerations in developing a particular service. There are some disagreements about the issue of timings, with Berger being aware that people want to finish at 19:25, and Jacobs feeling the timing can be flexible, but that they should include all of the statutory prayers. "Miriam makes the decisions as we are going along about what to leave out. We also make decisions ahead of time, what things will take time, what ultimate energy we want people to leave with. And what is going on in the world."

This leaves Jacobs to deal with the actual mechanics of the production of the music itself. When asked how she chooses the melody for a particular service, she replied:

I move between the idealistic and the real. Idealistically, to look at every text, figure out how the melody helps us to understand the text, is a *Midrash* on the text, helps to comment on it, then create a smaller repertoire that can change depending on what the community needs. And then choose. But also I have to consider what the *shul* really likes, like Craig Taubman's *V'shamru*. They love it, so we do it every week, until they have something else to fixate on. I also think about whether the melody will match the text or not – I can say we have different types of melodies, for instance, *Mi Chamocha*, mournful, or upbeat. I choose as I think the community will or will not understand it, but it is different for different people.

These passages above illustrate precisely what difference a cantor makes to the services of a synagogue, the quality of learned appreciation of the service, and profound considerations about how music and liturgy, and music and community, should interact. A director of music will place the emphasis on the musical presentation, as they are first and foremost musicians, as we have seen at WLS, a rabbi will place more emphasis on their sermon and the Torah reading, although some, by happenstance, may have a heightened interest in the musical side, as seen at Sinai Synagogue. But, as the developments at FRS, and in the movement at large, demonstrate, the presence of a clergyperson with specific education in liturgical music, has potential to shift the focus from melodies to meaning-in-melody. And through Jacobs's wider

involvement with the rabbis and the laity, the movement learns how to make thoughtful choices and mediate change.

Jacobs has also been a catalyst for some healing. She works closely with the choir, teaching and guiding them. She appreciates the additional tonal qualities a choir can offer. “It’s a much bigger group than it used to be. There are now thirty-five to thirty-eight people, and it is an events-based choir, for Yom Hazikkaron, anniversaries, inductions, and the High Holy Days. And I love having the choir there. It gives me a really strong sound in the room with really strong harmony. The only way we can get that gorgeous sound is to have the choir there. They and the Friday Singers are really good groups of amateurs who bring in more joy and energy than a lone guitarist singer can do.”

One can only imagine that, however disappointed the choir might be that they no longer sing on Shabbat, they have now found a place for themselves in the synagogue, are receiving the nurturing attention they always needed, and are appreciated and desired by the musical professional of the congregation.

Berger echoes the somewhat cautious approach mentioned by MCP that they have taken to changing the musical culture, and the actual musical repertoire, of the congregation: “We focus on how many new pieces we can introduce and we reinforce the ones we know. Because the *B’nei Mitzvah* kids have had a big say in their music on Friday night<sup>330</sup>, we have to make a backwards step but also, we then have a discussion with them about creating the Friday and Saturday services. We sometimes want a new tune, but we may need a *kavanah* about that new tune, maybe about what is going on in the world, that puts that tune in context. We need dialogue to support the introduction of a new piece.”

Given that music is a supra-lingual medium that is intended to touch the souls and rouse emotions, it is interesting that Berger does not really trust it enough to let the music alone tell the story. It needs to be hedged about with lucid explanation, perhaps too much over ratiocination. The following example offered by Berger, concerning a festival melody is illustrative: “*Adonai, Adonai* is an example of our process. Zoe had a beautiful melody, but

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<sup>330</sup> Jacobs reports that they are going to change the rule allowing BM families to choose the music

they knew their other one. So, we had to decide, which of the attributes of God do we want to come through more. People are there one time a year, and we throw them the fire and brimstone God. They get a different taste of religion – why should they not get the softer version of God as well. So, we thought that the God of compassion may be more what they need. We try to tie it in to what we do during the year, and it is difficult. It takes us back a step.”

Berger and Jacobs do diverge how they understand the mechanics both of producing and of introducing melodies. Jacobs states that, “My tendency is to sing soft, gentle, relaxing. Originally they were excited by that. I told them it didn’t have to all be upbeat. Over time, where my tendency is to go for beautiful melodies, they said that they wanted to be uplifted, not from meditative music, but from celebration, from an upbeat melody. I was told that it was okay to do a few meditative and calm pieces, because not every piece can be upbeat. They didn’t have before. But I have to make sure they feel the joy they want to feel on Shabbat - I was directed so by Council and Miriam.”

Every wary of privileging expertise, and wedded to discursive methods of decision-making, the one person in FRS who can claim really to know about all aspects of music and liturgy is required to be directed about type of melody, style of presentation, and mood to be created; whether in dialogue with her, or as feedback, or in some other manner, Jacobs needs constantly to be responsive. One can sense that it can be exhausting to work within this kind of a community, alongside the positive benefits thereof.

There was also much discussion over how and when to teach new music; Jacobs likes to teach songs at the beginning of the service, although that is not Berger’s preference. Jacobs has introduced music which is later sung *en situ*, sometimes simply presented, sometimes with contextualization. But the solution to the realization that there exist differences of opinions led her to “work with the group of six to eight people who are the Friday night singers, sometimes working on harmonies, sometimes on new pieces, and I elicit feedback on how to do it. They are then sitting in the first couple of rows during the service.” The presence of those already in the know definitely helps with the reception of music, although it is not clear how this is not some form of a choir. It seems it is acceptable to privilege some singers, elevate them through knowledge, place them in the front of the congregation, and ask them to help sing, as long as it is not called a choir.



Both Berger and Jacobs are aware that everything they are working on is a stage in a process, that the congregation is not where they wish it to be, but there is great understanding of the problematic of change in general and change of tune. Berger acknowledges that “Change is a process difficult for most people. Music also reflects the whole culture of the community. I am not trying to change the culture, just trying to give the community the ability to say what they want. Alyth wants a cantor – they want to change the whole culture.”

Jacobs had her own epiphany concerning the difficulty in musical change: “I listen to a lot of Jewish music. Anything. When I listen, I think, do I like this or do I not like this. It takes a long time to fall in love with something. It was very helpful when I understood that, as it helped me understand what the community feels about new music. Sometimes they say they like it right away, but often they do say they need time to get used to it.”

Although Berger and Jacobs believe that they are merely modifying the service in incremental ways, actually, they have transformed FRS dramatically, and dramatic change is a characteristic of FRS. In startling contrast to other synagogues, they move through crisis, perhaps even stimulating crises, to enable dramatic reconstructions of their community.

Nonetheless, they feel that they are not yet where they wish to be. Both were asked to describe their ideal vision of musical services at FRS. Berger replied that “I want us to get to where Friday feels like a journey, a high energy release from the week gone by, that *Kabbalat Shabbat* would be to allow people to come in, feel comfortable, and released, then at *Ma'ariv* we could have a change of tempo. We only know pieces; there is too much stopping and starting.”

The implication here is that the pulse needs to be spirited, which relates to the critique of Jacobs’s more elegiac sense of tempo. And, although Berger expresses a feel for continuous flow during services, she herself interjects comments at various junctures. It is curious that she desires a fluid progression of prayer for this would require, for its execution, the *nusach* in which they are loath to engage, and the expectation that the congregation would be able and willing to move seamlessly through the service in a more independent form.

Jacob’s response was based on a desire to inject Friday night with the movement that comes from chanting and singing the *Kabbalat Shabbat* Psalms at some length. “I would love to

spend time on the Friday night Psalms and give them the time they need. But we cannot do all that with the *lailailais* and the introductions to the prayers.” Jacobs was part of a highly influential group of young Jews who formed the Reform Chavurah, and whose members are mostly now leaders within the Reform Jewish community, including, as noted, the Principal of the Leo Baeck College. She relates that this model of service is compelling to her: “The Reform Chavurah went straight through the service, no talking, because they wanted a feeling of authenticity, with as much liturgy as they could fit in. They wanted to be as Jewish as possible. At FRS this is not the service they want.”

Along with making a desire to “make everyone a cantor or a rabbi,” ZJ would like to see FRS

...prioritizing music, partly through financial means, to employ really talented accompanists, professional musicians, to support and back up our lay musicians. I don't want to get rid of the lay musicians; I would like a mix of the two. It's hard to get that across. But that costs money. I'd like the community to get to a place that making a change doesn't cause a crisis, when we make a change, it causes a huge wave. I would like to get to a place where it only is a ripple. I would like to have strong core of lay musicians, with understanding of the liturgy, not just what they like, so I don't have to be around so often, so that they can function whether I am there or not. I would like to be at a place where I can help other communities but I can only start to be helpful if I boost our leaders in the *shul*.

Within that text is an element of frustration that ultimately, her job may not be transformative, and that the degree of interest in musical expertise is ultimately partial. Having invested in a musical professional, it seems that is as far as FRS wishes to go with musical professionalism, and thus, FRS may be utilizing only some of the expertise that a cantor can bring. One aspect of their work traditionally has been to function as the musical expert on the different modes, or *nusach*, of the tradition, and to use these to signal the varying festivals and holy days, and to mark the different times of the day. This part of the training requires an understanding of the modes and their application in the liturgy, but it is a specialist field, and FRS prefers participation and democratization to expertise.

### 6.5.2 *Nusach*

It was unclear whether Jacobs was able to make use of that part of her training, or was less concerned about *nusach*, despite the burgeoning interest amongst some rabbis. “I don’t use *nusach* in that way. I understand the division between *Shabbat*, the High Holy Days and the *Shalosh Regalim*, but *dayenu*, I don’t worry or care strongly enough about the differences between the days. I didn’t change the *Amidah* at all; the fact that they were singing it was a miracle, because they would not have done so seven years ago, and that was good enough for me.” When Jacobs does use *nusach*, she standardizes it so that they all can join in, removing the element of improvisation that it traditionally allows.

Berger holds strong views about use of *nusach* and how its use would conflict with the higher value FRS places on inclusivity:

We have introduced more *nusach*, for example, we chant the *Shema*. It’s not really important that it is the right one. We are using *nusach* and *leyning* as tools to create educated Jews. It’s not about everyone feeling that it is important to use *nusach*, but it is a flag, to indicate that it is that time of the year, that season. It allows people to feel we are taking them through a journey. But I’m not rigid about using it in an appropriate way. If we have been chanting all year, teaching some of that, and then get to a festival, or see that there are a lot of new people, we need to ask, ‘do we use the other *nusach*, which no one knows, or do we say that sometimes we’ll just use the one they all know’. On a *yontiff* weekday, with the literate ones there, then we do more. Otherwise, we try to be as inclusive as possible.

What is interesting in the above is the misperception of what *nusach* is. The chant used for the *Shema* is not *nusach*, but rather, the trope used for chanting the Torah, as the first paragraph of the *Shema* is a selection from the book of Deuteronomy. And, *nusach* is not simply variable by the time of the year, but even within a *Shabbat* morning service, the various sections use different *nusach*.

It is significant that neither professional places a premium on this most basic and elemental of Jewish musical offerings. In fact, the HUC School of Sacred Music does teach the appropriate *nusach* for the appropriate times and publishes sheet music on the URJ’s website

to guide lay people in chanting the correct modes at the correct time. However, in my encounters with Reform cantors, it seems that the emphasis is more on the musicalization of congregations and the introduction of musical variety, with the goal of enhancing worship and thus attendance. As one learning to be a cantor with someone trained in the Conservative Movement, there is a fundamentally different approach to the use of music, and in particular, the *nusach*, in the service. This is reflected in the different approach to instructing cantors in *nusach*, perhaps best characterized as a difference between prescriptive and descriptive approaches. With the former, the *nusach* is captured in notes and can be memorized and invariably applied to the appropriate liturgy. The descriptive entails learning the *nusach*, exploring the various ways cantors have crafted both their chanting and the set pieces they compose based on *nusach*, and then being able improvisationally and appropriately to apply the modes to the proper prayers at the proper time. Traditional congregations participate fully but also appreciate the art and craft of a cantor and the idea of some aspect of the singing done without the full participation of the congregation does not disturb them.

Jacobs herself knows that participation is not always necessary:

You don't have to have people participate all the time, I learned at school, and I love to listen to a great leader, it allows me greater access to my inner spirituality. When I introduced, for example, the new Debbie Friedman *Oseh Shalom*, I sang it twice. They then developed the idea that Zoe sings the first time, the congregation the second time and some were irritated that people tried to join in the first time. Now I do it one time, and they all join in. I spent so long giving them the 'you are welcome to join in' speech that that is now what they do. I tell people to do what they need to do. But when Judith Silver,<sup>331</sup> PI and I sing three-part harmony, they do listen. And we get amazing reactions. It's so beautiful, we really love it, but we don't do it every week. If we had a trio or quartet could do that more often, but I have no access to that.

A niggle appears. Perhaps we touch an imperceptible speck of concern that, in the future, Jacobs's further growth as a cantor and FRS's self-perception may collide.

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<sup>331</sup> A well-known British Jewish singer-songwriter who has a strong connection to FRS but is also highly regarded in the USA.

### 6.5.3 The Services Themselves

Prior to commencing, Berger and Jacobs move through the congregation, greeting people, dressed in casual-smart attire, Jacobs often in dressy trousers. On a Friday night during term-time, they will both have been busy with the *B'nei Mitzvah*, so they have little time to transition from one state to the other.

People arrive, forming small groups of friends, and begin chatting. I have a years' long relationship both to the congregation and to many of the people there, so it is easy for me to find someone to speak to, but I can observe that a stranger would not find it a comfortable environment to enter. It feels like a tightly knit historically acquainted small community, a feeling enhanced during the services by in jokes and allusions that you need to be an insider to 'get'. It is not to say that groups such as these, which unite on occasions people who live in a wide variety of locations and who have known each other and are perhaps related to each other, as FRS has many intergenerational members, are required to remain open, but rather, to note that this does contradict the 'inclusive' objective. One contact from WLS stated that she had attended services at FRS but found it difficult to find a place for herself in the *shul*, preferring in the end the large, anonymous, West London, with its diversity and its ability to allow people to be, if alone, then at least not lonely.

Friday Group adds an air of disorder to the proceedings, as parents arrive to collect children and the children themselves engage in energetic social interactions with each other. It is a lively scene, but not a particularly spiritual one. Both of the other synagogue buildings lend themselves far better to compartmentalization and thus, to creating multiple spaces able to effect different atmospheres.

On Shabbat morning, the children are present and again, there is much milling about of young people (and the *B'nei Mitzvah* class does enter and leave for parts of the service) who are attired very casually and who may not be in a *shabbosdik* [a Sabbath-ful] frame of mind. The conclusion of the service coincides with the end of classes, and the atmosphere is further disturbed by the arrival of parents who have not attended services, dressed in weekend hobby clothes and clearly not observant. Secular and profane mix, collide, co-exist. It may be that it is more difficult in such an atmosphere to create a spiritual space through music, because it is

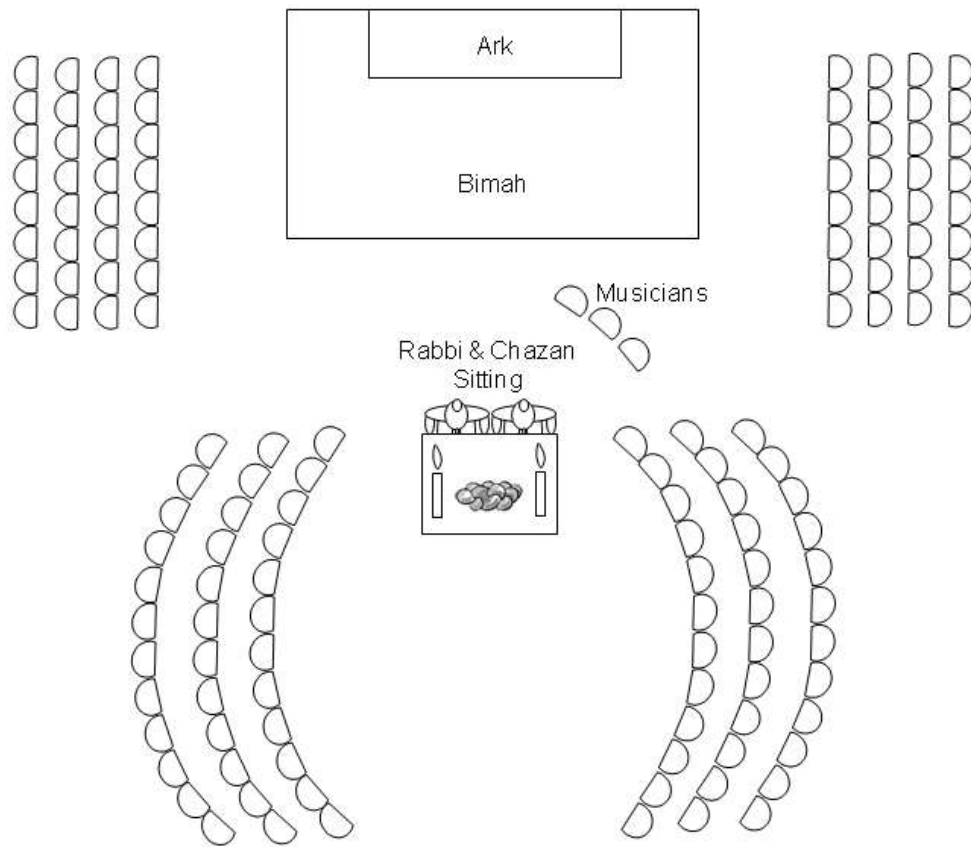
difficult for music to rise up the various challenges that the building and the activities therein present. And perhaps only rousing melodies and tempi can compete.

The Shabbat morning arrangement offers a third model of leadership positioning, with WLS on a high *bimah* lifted up and away from the congregation, facing them in theatre style; Sinai Synagogue with the rabbi as far forward as possible, the congregation almost entirely behind him and he with his back to them; and here, with the congregation entirely in front of the rabbi and cantor, seated so that they can look at whoever is leading and as well at each other. The leaders take the stance of performers in this model, albeit also giving the message that they are at the same time participants in the service. Their dress is generally more formal in the morning – Jacobs is usually wearing a skirt. As there have also been classes meeting – adults, *B'nei Mitzvah* and pre-*B'nei Mitzvah* – the *shatz* may very well have been occupied with these, although generally, Shabbat morning *shiurim* are lay led. Lay leading also extends to the services - the two women do not always co-lead the services.

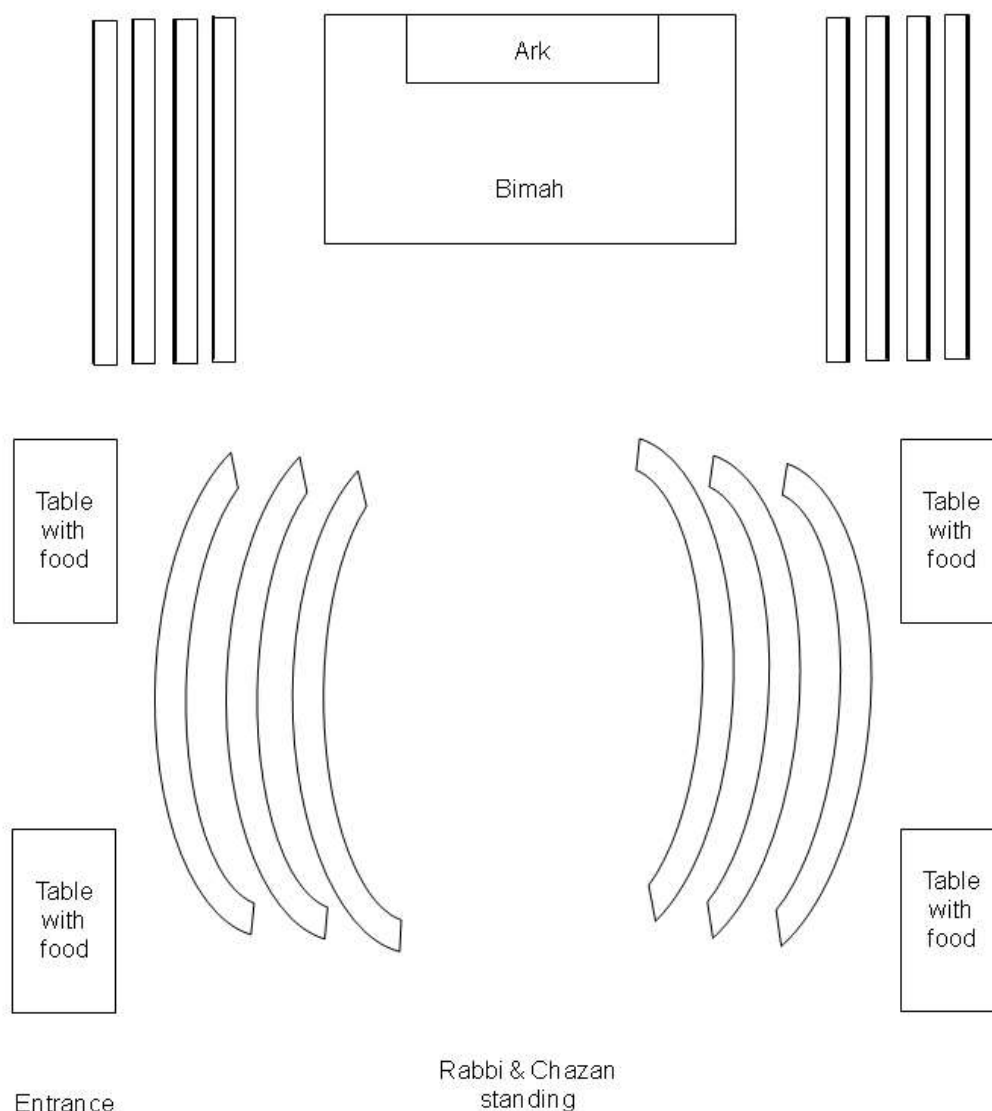
On a monthly basis, the other multi-purpose room is transformed into a circular space for the alternative service, or is used by those who do not wish to be part of the monthly family service, which now occupies the main sanctuary.

Although one does not enter to space encoded by music, at some point, either a *niggun* is played on the guitar or a melody is sung, announcing the beginning of holy time-in-space. The singing moves at a clip, and people sing with confidence - one feels that this is music you need to be an insider to know. In fact, the rapid entry into singing in a round, or harmonizing, marks the insiders and is a further indication of the sense of pride and sometimes hint of an air of superiority that characterises FRS.

Berger, Jacobs, and the musicians who lead the Friday night service are seated. FRS still maintains the distinction in mood and affect between Friday and Shabbat morning, the first quite informal, the other rather more 'traditional' and formal. In a further demonstration of the unique features of FRS, many times the entire group of leaders is women.



Entrance



Berger will generally speak and set the opening boundary of the formal service, and give instructions, sometimes after Jacobs introduces a melody. Although they are not spatially designated as *klei kodesh*, Berger in particular does appear to be so regarded. Her presentations are made with a smile and references to news that only members would appreciate. There is a rather self-congratulatory, even smug tone both at the beginning and at various junctures when announcements are made. The congregation is rapidly transported into a cohesive group of seemingly happy, contented people, with quite a bit of sentimental body language and facial expression. They seem to regard Berger with adoration. It feels somewhat cult-like, but whether that is a personality cult or an organizational one, the cult of FRS, is difficult to determine. It is interesting to observe this when one is aware of the alluded to tensions underneath. Their pride in what they have accomplished is quite



appropriate, but whether it appears as pride or as complacent superiority depends on whether you are an insider or an outsider.

Friday night music is very upbeat, and Jacobs clearly functions as a song leader when Berger is present. On one occasion, having sung a *niggun*, she introduced it verbally, then sang it after explaining where it was to be found, both in the *siddur* and in Daf. After the candles are lit, she then moves to *Shalom Aleichem*, a modern American arrangement, and then to a very spritely *Yedid Nefesh*. Much of the service is sung, it is quite upbeat, and always accompanied by guitar. As at WLS, the 2 *shlichei tzibur* look up and around quite a bit, indicating a preference for a presentational style of service leading and disregarding the printed text. One could argue that, in this circumstance, with them seated and therefore at the level of the congregation, they are simply participating, but this throws up the same rhetorical problem it did at WLS, namely, of what use is the *siddur*, what is its purpose, if it is metaphorically discarded not just by the congregation, but also by the clergy.

They next sing one of the Friday night Psalms as people join in with gusto and rich harmonies, and then move to *Lecha Dodi*, both newer arrangements, at a moderate to quick pace. Jacobs often utilizes a melody for *Lecha Dodi* which proceeds through progressive *accelerandi* and I wonder how that matches the text, her avowed intent? She then leads them in one line or small part of either Psalm 92 or 93, occasionally using the old standard Lewandowski *Tzadik K'tamar*. In all cases, there is general and lusty participation and perfect harmonies. They follow her pace and stop without straggling. The whole congregation appears as if to be a well-rehearsed choir.

The *Barechu* is sung to a catchy tune, before they move to the prayers before the *Shema*. They are both read in Hebrew, and people join in, without invitation. Jacobs tails the prayers with the standardized, and appropriate, Friday night *nusach*, which again, the congregation joins in chanting. She leads these *a capella*.

The first moment of quiet enters with the refrain to the *Shema*, which is then chanted and then quite a good period of time is given for silent meditation. Jacobs concludes the silence with Lewandowski's version of *L'ma'an Tizkaru*,<sup>332</sup> again unaccompanied.

After the *Shema*, the rest of the prayers are recited solely in Hebrew. Berger stated that she prefers to conduct ninety-five percent of the service in Hebrew, one of the highest proportions amongst the Reform rabbinate. Jacobs leads the *Mi Chamocha*, to the call and response melody that seems to be their current standard, after which she does some more *nusach*-chanting.

The *Amidah* commences with an progressively faster rendition of *Adonai Sefatai*, perhaps an illustration of the diktat that the mood is to be buoyant regardless of appropriacy; this small snippet introduces the recitation of the most awesome chain of prayers, saying, "Eternal, open my lips that my mouth may declare Your praise," but the musical message is one of fun, not reverence. Sometimes parts of *Amidah* are chanted using the Shabbat morning *nusach* (as is very commonly done in the movement) and sometimes it is done silently, as per tradition and as per the suggestions in the new *siddur*. After the *Amidah*, there is a small hum in a major key, introducing the prayer for healing. This seems a more appropriate place for it rather than its placement in the middle of the *Amidah* as per WLS. Jacobs then leads the hum again, which morphs into *Yiheyu L'ratzon*, then *Oseh Shalom*, finally concluding with the same hum.

Either Berger or Jacobs then offers a chat about something timely, or about their activities, or something to do with the Movement, sometimes seemingly conflating FRS and the MRJ. They then turn to the *Aleynu*, led by Berger, with harmonies that blend and, omitting the second paragraph, move directly to the *Bayom Hahu*. Prior to *Kaddish*, names are read out, with none solicited from the floor. In terms of formality-informality, it lies between WLS, in which there is virtually no spontaneity, at least during the service, and Sinai Synagogue, in which there is perhaps too little dignity at times.

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<sup>332</sup> As this is the end of the *Shema*, comprising certain Biblical verses, the melody is, again, based on the Torah trope.

Finally, they end with one song or another, almost never the [traditional] hymn *Yigdal*. When *Kiddush* is set up at the front of the hall, and not on the small tables, ZJ will get up and dance over to the *Kiddush* table, accelerating, as people either leave or move over with her. Berger tends to lead *Kiddush* when she is present.

When there is a *B'nei Mitzvah*, the child is quite fully integrated into the service, and some of the in-service chat will be directed towards them. They then lead the *Kiddush*, and, as we have noted, many of the melodies will have been chosen by the child and his/her family, although this has been circumscribed.

During the services, some people tap their feet in time, the guitar encouraging a more rhythmical response than the organ and with deep resonances for certain generations – and there is even on occasion a woman who presents as an ‘ecstatic.’ I am told that she was once a member, who has returned to FRS attracted by the music. It is interesting to note that the outliers are those not transported. One is a Senior Warden, and former head of the Ritual Committee, who attends all services, and yet, presents a worried scowl to the world. Another is a husband of an active member, who appears uninvolved, and unmoved. I see two men near me shut their eyes sometimes. No one stands up and dances, but later on, there is a little swaying of bodies; there is a great deal of pleased smiling however. What is most noteworthy is the manner in which they function as one grand congregational choir and one very pleased with themselves at that.

There is a very wide range of ages present, from babies and toddlers, through teens, middle ages, and some elderly, all dressed in fairly informal to quite informal dress. I rarely see a tie.

On Shabbat morning, the leaders stand, at the back and facing the ark. When Jacobs is in charge, she appears in the mode of a song leader, but she has an air of prayerful leadership about her, announces pages gently, and sings more quiet passages than on the evening. Berger announces things in much the same way whenever she leads, lacking a mellifluous voice altogether. The congregation is, as in the evening, called together through song, after which, when she is present, Berger gives another warm communally-oriented message to the congregation, drawing forth an enthusiastic response.

They begin the service proper with *Mah Tov*; when the canonical version, each leads a group, with Jacobs on guitar and the congregation expertly breaking into parts. Some of the opening prayers are read, in Hebrew, but often skipping the main group of prayers, the eponymous *Birchot Hashachar*. *Elohai Nishamah*, and *Adonai Melech*, were sung to the classic MRJ melodies. The study passage is given to the family of a *B'nei Mitzvah* when there is one, but when not, either a congregant or the clergy, in which circumstance the whole congregation joins in the *brachah*. They seem either not to know, or to privilege, the idea of an honouree with responsibility for the relationship between a *brachah* and an action. The *Kol Hanishama* melody is the one from the eponymous synagogue in Jerusalem, during which they broke into spontaneous rounds, and, as if one, fade to pianissimo. It is most striking.

*Pesuke d'Zimra* begins with some scene setting chat, then a page is announced, invariably skipping always through the traditionally most important prayer of the section. They generally sing one or another of the Psalms and songs, usually to well-worn melodies, as some of these are the *zemirot* that featured prominently in the last *siddur*. *Nishmat* is done to the Sussman melody, the rest of the choices are read in Hebrew, and they turn to *Ilu Finu*, sung to a very complicated melody that requires great skill in part singing. Again, the presentation is impressive. At *Shochein Ad*, in a traditional synagogue the place where the *chazan* assumes his role, Jacobs leads *a capella*, although many join in. They stand without instruction; again, once senses that they have been well-trained and rehearsed, and know their way around the service. *Shochein Ad* and *Yistabach* are done to the stylized form of *nusach*, as described above, and, during *Chatzi Kaddish*, the congregation sang their responses as per tradition.

During the above, the two comport themselves as the rabbis at WLS do, that is, they scan the congregation, in particular during the musical selections. There is sort of casual perfunctory impression given – one will adjust her *tallit*, the other leaning forwards for water at times when there might be expected to be more attentiveness to the current prayer, as if to indicate that they see themselves as on and off-duty during the service. Distractions abound, as people enter behind the leaders, and the warden is often jumping up and scampering about. There is far less emphasis on decorum here than in the other two synagogues.

The next section opens with, generally, the Lewandowski Friday night melody for the *Barechu*, with response, but no repetition of the first line. The next prayer is in Hebrew, then the following one is in English, read quickly and in a matter of fact tone. Page numbers are not announced. Jacobs tails the prayers in her manner, scanning the congregation, and then, at the *Shema*, closes her eyes, whilst Berger does not. As with Friday night, the response *Baruch Shem* is done *sotto voce*, but audibly, not silently, as in many Reform synagogues. Berger often leads the *V'ahavta* and *L'ma'an*, with the congregation participating, then moves on to read the *Emet*, fairly quickly, until Jacobs, on guitar, leads the call and response version of *Mi Chamocha*, or another melody therefor. They generally end this section with the classic melody for *Tzur Yisrael*, the congregation again spontaneously standing in preparation for the *Amidah*. As at WLS, the leaders sometimes seem quite distracted, toy with their hair, monitor the congregation, and thus they enter the *Amidah*, after a page announcement.

On Shabbat morning, they often sing the classic *Adonai Sefatai*, at a more sedate pace, and then Jacobs leads the singing of the next paragraphs *a capella*. The congregation follows, despite the lack of page number reminders, and adds their harmonies to *Yimloch Adonai* in the *Kedushah*. Jacobs chants, with *nusach*, *Yismach Moshe*, again with a bit of participation, then they generally sing the Lewandowski Friday night *V'shamru* melody. Jacobs, as at WLS drinks water throughout - there is no deference to its centrality nor of the teachings about the *kavanah* it demands, to be read standing straight, feet together, without interruption. The rest of the *Amidah*, bar one prayer, is read in Hebrew, and then, at the end of the silence, Jacobs leads *Oseh Shalom*, paying careful attention to the crescendos and decrescendos. Unlike both WLS and Sinai Synagogue, there is a variety of dynamics, one of the places where Jacobs's sense of appropriacy of text and music finds its most significant expression.

As the leaders move to the *bimah*, at the other end of the sanctuary, the congregation essentially leads the opening to the Torah service, sometimes skipping *Av Harachamim*. Berger then reads the short Hebrew passages, followed by a congregationally-led sung response, and the procession heads off to [one of] the classic melodies for *L'cha Adonai*. The music for the first *hagbahah* [lifting and displaying the section of the Torah being read] is

read and sung, led by the leaders of prayer, to the classic melodies. Children crowd onto the *bimah* to help undress the scroll.<sup>333</sup>

As is not uncommon, there is a dissipation of formality as Berger or whoever is leading the service begins to tell the congregation where to find the readings. There is a tendency to deliver all communications in a manner that elicits great laughter or broad smiles; all in all, this presents as a close-knit, contented family community.

When there is a *bat/bar mitzvah*, the child is called up to the Torah as the students from his/her class stomp their feet. This eruption of noise is expected and welcomed, part of the ethos of retaining young people; otherwise, there is a normal pattern of call-ups. Most of those who chant the brachot do so to the *bat/bar mitzvah* melody. Sometimes the *haftarah brachot* are chanted, and again, despite this being an individual's honour, people will join in.

After the readings, sometimes chanted, sometimes not – Jacobs chants and extends that to the English, but Berger does not know how. The congregation takes responsibility for the music for returning the *sefer Torah* to the ark; it is obviously not as carefully rehearsed. I imagine that this is a wise move, as there seems to be in most MRJ congregations such devoted attachment to the standard Torah service melodies that changing them always brings anger and irritation to the fore. Leaving this music intact, and in the hands of the congregation, is a prudent way to counterbalance the addition of new music, and removal of formerly sung melodies. However, the refinement and musicianship Jacobs has been at great pains to develop does dissipate with the singing of the old melodies left to the devices of the community.

There is virtually always a formal sermon, and with Berger, they have increasingly focused on social action issues, often referencing her, or FRS, participation in one or another event, social activism being a major plank both in the foundation of FRS and during Newman's tenure.

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<sup>333</sup> This *mitzvah, gelilah*, is an important one in a traditional service, reserved for those over Bar/Bat Mitzvah age, but the custom in the progressive Jewish world is to give this to children as a way of engaging them.

They have never done *Musaf*, but they do sing *Ein Keloheinu*, often to the usual melody, and then instruction and guidance is, unusually, given for the *Aleinu*. This is sung to the classic melody, with light harmony, and then a rare piece of English read, the alternate second paragraph. Names are read out, and then, after the *Kaddish* is recited, Jacobs leads the singing of *Oseh Shalom*.

The usual announcements are made, but FRS requires one more and that is, that everyone is invited to help to move the chairs out of the way so there is room for *Kiddush*, food having been distributed over a few tables at the back prior to the beginning. The service concludes with *Adon Olam*, sung to various melodies, there is a final blessing, and then, as chairs are being moved, Jacobs, when present, leads *Kiddush* and *Motzi* in a fairly hurried manner. At this point, as noted above, children are being collected, people are catching up with each other, and there is a general intersection of moods and modes of being. With the dissembling of the chairs and the set-up for service, the atmosphere so carefully constructed unravels fairly quickly, as they move into *communitas* within the same space that serves moments earlier as sacred space. It is unfortunately, rather disruptive of the prayerful mood.

Shabbat morning also features two alternative services, as well as the Rhythm and Jews service, formerly an alternative which has proven so popular that it takes over the main sanctuary as the main service when it is scheduled.

It is perhaps interesting to read the quite different descriptions of these alternatives. Both are called ‘Small Hall Services.’ The one which follows on from the monthly educational sessions called *Shira* is called ‘Small Hall Service *Shira*-style’, meeting four times in a year, during which there is an “...all-sung *Shira*-style service examining certain prayers along the way. This service allows time for melodies and harmonies to develop, and is open to everyone. Enthusiasm for singing is the only pre-requisite for participation.”<sup>334</sup>

By way of contrast is the service known as the Small Hall service, conceived of and led by Director of Spirituality, Cooper, which describes itself as “...an informal Shabbat morning service which combines traditional and contemporary forms of prayer, as well as opportunities for conversation as a form of prayer, study and song - and quiet time. What is

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<sup>334</sup> <http://www.frsonline.org/Services/SmallHallServices/>

distinctive...is that [we] encourage participation but also respect each congregant's own ideas, emotional realities and spiritual needs which they bring with them... No prior knowledge or expertise is assumed or required.”<sup>335</sup>

The latter is now the only space in which this rather contemplative and older style of Reform service takes place at FRS. As such, it does tend to attract many of the founder members, whether dismayed by the new spirit of musical presentation or not.

## **6.6 Teaching the Congregation**

This rubric is uniquely applied to FRS. As Jacobs is devoutly committed to the musical education of the congregation, she has organized many educational courses for lay readers and lay singers. In these, she teaches the shape of the service, lists the possible sung passages, and invites the attendees to engage with the text, envision its production, expand their repertoire, and to make informed choices, planning the service in this meticulous manner before leading it. She has prepared many different types of hand-outs, constituting a trove of ideas concerning liturgical music.

Once a month she leads a session called Shirah, a 9:15 gathering, during which time the MRJ songbooks are handed out, and people are taught the harmonies and the songs that will be used. Those who have attended, which tends to have a consistent following, then sit mingled throughout the congregation, providing extra guidance to the whole. On the website, it is advertised as having been

...instigated after a number of members of the community expressed a desire to sing Jewish music outside the confines of a service or a formal choir. We were looking for a relaxed way to enjoy each other's voices and to learn new Jewish music. The mood is contemplative at times, and upbeat at other times, reflecting the needs of the community... We have attracted people who were previously not interested in singing in a choir or any formal setting, and also visitors to the community who have led us or simply joined in. What the community seems to enjoy about Shira is the chance to

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid.



connect with other people and learn new tunes without the feeling of 'rehearsing' or 'performing': Shira is music 'lishma', for its own sake. We seem able to steep ourselves in harmonies that only come from a connection with each other and the impulse of improvisation. The result is a sound that fills both the room and the soul. Do join us!<sup>336</sup>

Having participated in these on a couple of occasions, I might dissent from the idea that these are [simply] informal opportunities to sing. Rather, music is often introduced, rehearsed, harmonized, and then inserted into the service. Singing for its own sake, yes, but it is placed before the service as a way to enhance the music during the service. And Jacobs is clearly the conductor; it resembles a rehearsal. One might suggest that there are no opportunities simply for casual singing at FRS. All singing is goal-oriented.

Music is made available in other ways. There is a CD available of the music used during the family service Rhythm and Jews, and, on the website, a few sound clips of the Friday singers, presenting some of the commonly sung Friday music. One has a slight premonition this mean that a certain melodic rigor mortis has begun to set in, and that, although the tunes may be different than those sung elsewhere, or in FRS's own past, a certain and set new tradition of melodies will appear Shabbat after Shabbat, in much the same way as WLS's Shirah service has settled into its own repertoire.

## **6.7 Reception and Rejection – The Congregation**

In attempting to find people to interview, I had, as with the other synagogues, support from the *bimah*, acknowledging the process as 'kosher.' There was some palpable apprehension, however. One congregant asked a number of times if he could read the thesis, and Jacobs asked if I would let her know if there was anything that came out of the interviews that I felt was important feedback for her. I told her I would do so, but anonymously.

There is both enthusiastic reception and measured rejection of these latest changes, despite the caution the leadership have exhibited, and the attention to criticism. What is noteworthy

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<sup>336</sup> FRS online

is the degree to which the community is able to articulate feelings about music, evidence that they have been taught a language with which to verbalize their feelings about music that other congregations have not.

As can be noted in the descriptions of the alternatives, the clergy have radically different ideas about creating spiritual space on *Shabbat*. For Berger, it is about celebration and release; for Jacobs it is about joyfully exploring music, and the prayers through and with the music; for Cooper, services revolve around the verbal examination of prayer and thoughts about prayer, and music does not feature prominently, in fact, detracts from the ability to achieve spiritual presence.

Within that alternative cohort are some of the founder members, many of whom, by their own admission, are not attuned to liturgical music nor capable of leading the music of the service. Further, given their well-known experiments with other forms of religious expression, and perhaps drawing inspiration from Rabbi Lionel Blue's attraction to monasterial silences and contemplative practises, some have hinted that the main service is too 'noisy', too ebullient, to appear spiritual, and the choir and melodies of the past had offered some dignified musical interludes within a mostly intoned service. This is a recurrent objection to musical change, a hankering and a preference for the ur-services, orderly, decorous, ratiocinative, and framed by the music of habituation.

EA, who looks to music for inspiration and does not attend the alternative service, is nonetheless, concerned at both the pace and pervasive amount of change there has been since she joined in 1990. She realizes that the previously there was "a sort of uneasy coexistence between two styles, the Sulzer-Lewandowski choral side, and suddenly bits of Simon and Garfunkel." Whilst appreciating that this was a rather untenable situation, and that "Zoe broke the deadlock" she notes that she brought with her a lot of new music, much of which was composed in America and feels that "...the result is the service she does is music-full and full being the operative word. It sometimes feels like the story of the Baal Shem coming to a *shul* too full of prayer."

This is a fascinating analogy. The story, included in *Forms of Prayer* describes the *Besht* [Baal Shem Tov, founder of Chasidism] entering a *shul* in which the words seem to crowd out the *kavanah*; for EA's, the music is so prominent that it crowds out that which lies underneath and on top – the prayerfulness, the words. And yet, on the other hand, Chassidic

services are hugely synaesthetic; their music, albeit often wordless *niggunim*, is sung in a rather vigorous and brash manner, with lots of stamping and dancing. Reform Jews are often muddled about what they want from their music and their services, sometimes creating a cacophony of different styles that is discordant and clashing.

EA felt that “that although the standard was raised, some feel that one style came in too fast and dominates.” When asked whether people want the Lewandowski and Sulzer back, she replied that “Many people very much liked it but there are others who grumble, not because they have particular preferences, but because it was just too much change, too fast.”

EA was one of the rota of Lead Singers and reflects the underlying tensions concerning what the FRS members really desire. “There had been a choir, and then there was a sense it wasn’t popular, as it was grinding out the same sort of stuff, so it was disbanded. Then there were the lay musical leaders, which aroused a certain amount of hope, and a feeling that yes, right, here’s a chance to get in some variety.’ Yet, no, people wanted what they were used to.” As a soloist, she was privy to the inner musical workings of the services. “The designated person would phone the rabbi or whoever was leading and ask about tunes, and the general feelings was ‘you have to be a bit cautious’. The rabbi said, ‘Yes, I am sympathetic, but people will object, so only one new piece a service.’” And here is a source of resentment. “There is a double standard – we had to be cautious, but Zoe can change everything she wants.”

EA stems from a different musical tradition, which she felt was not welcome, problematizing the myth of diversity of music at FRS. “I was from the Moroccan tradition, and wanted to introduce some of that music and people said yes, great idea, but then, ignored me when I tried to do it, and made me feel that it wasn’t welcome. It was a slightly different style, music people haven’t heard before, but no, there was only diversity in one direction.”

She seemed to enjoy the opportunity to be heard, which indicates that hers is not a privileged voice, and that she feels that she is not truly one of the insiders.

When I asked her what she felt was the place of music, she again referenced musical ubiquity, echoing some of what we pick up here and elsewhere about the very fundamental changes in general to the core Reform service mode. “That’s a very interesting question. At the moment, it is showing a bit of a tendency to take over, which is a mistake. If you get the

impression that it is a purely musical event, then it can overlay the structure and content of the service, if you are actually following the meaning of the words; if it is a melody you know well, the music can take second place and you can pray; if it is a new melody, then that takes first place. There is room for that, but there needs to be a balance.”

Here is an important observation. The emphasis on music as the prime carrier of spiritual renewal, as that which most lends meaning to the words, is here subverted, and the music becomes an obstacle to prayer. In fact, she seems to hint that music should always be subservient to prayer. This is not the same valence as saying that there needs to be congruence between word and melody (and performance thereof, as it is not simply the melody, but how that melody is delivered.) but rather, that the music should be handmaiden to the words and not distract. We shall soon see how others wish for precisely the opposite – the music as overlord to the words.

She is aware of the above and understands that for some people, music is all that can make a service meaningful: “If you take the prayers apart, you can ask, is this what I want to say anyway, so the music may help there, or if someone doesn’t know Hebrew, the music may make it for them. The opportunity to participate is also very important, whether musical or not. The kind of breath control it requires and effect on the nerves music is salutary, like yoga. It can amount to a kind of mediation for some people.”

She argues for true musical diversity, and when asked what she would ideally like, she replied, “It is not easy to put into words. I think there is a place for some of the ultra-musical types of services, then other, very straightforward ones, with traditional *nusach*. There is already that variation – the feeling of Friday night is different from that of Saturday; there is a different feeling when there is a *bar* or *bat mitzvah*...” She stops and smiles, “Occasionally I do find it overwhelming but maybe, as I think about it, not so much?”

I asked why *nusach*?

Basic chant is a way of being less self-conscious about the words. Sometimes if things are read out in simple words, especially in English, one feels self-conscious, that it is not sophisticated so chant takes that away. It’s a sort of lubrication. The choral works are decoration. *Nusach* is not so much about spirituality, but about the flow, the effect

on the nervous system. The straight *nusah* for the *Shema* [sic] and *Amidah*, the happy medium between the reading, painful, cold, self-conscious, and the full frontal where their music takes over and fragments the service. I don't know? All about how each bit contributes to the flow of the whole.

She is not positive about that which I observed, that the Torah service and its music has been rendered sacrosanct: "There is a feeling that that part is almost untouchable. God forbid you should change one of those tunes! I mean, for *Lecha Dodi* and others, there is a choice of two or three melodies, but not in the Torah service. It may not be a bad thing, because people take it as a kind of anchor; especially where everything else around them is changing, there is a case for something familiar."

Reform music has imitated Shlomo Carlebach, the neo-Chasidic and Chasidic worlds, in stressing the use of snippets of a prayer, as a kind of *kavanah*, or meditation, and it is not uncommon for Jacobs to sing an excerpt of a passage, and not the whole thing. EA finds that less appealing: "Set pieces can enhance but the question is just how far you take that. So, take *Sim Shalom*, a little melody that turns into a round, occasionally a nice change, but I would rather just get on with it, get on with the words, because *Adonai* is repeated and that goes against what it should be,<sup>337</sup> and that it can make it a bit bitty, break the flow of the prayer. If sung through to a formal setting, that will take too long. It's all a matter of timing and planning, which is a difficult thing. They do need to do different things, but maybe that is what is happening."

EA is one of the more learned about music, knows about many traditions of Jewish music and stems from an Eastern traditional background, whereas both Berger and Jacobs were raised in the Reform world. She is struggling with the repertoire and its American pop style timbre. Her most critical remarks revolved around Debbie Friedman, who, more than anyone else inspired Jacobs, who studied with her, brought her over to do a concert at FRS, and, when she died in early 2011, organized a memorial concert for her in London. EA, on the other hand, finds much of the new music at FRS "obvious, Western and trite. It all sounds like Debbie Friedman to me; it's a genre of its own." I recommended that she attend Shirah at WLS, where there is more musical diversity.

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<sup>337</sup> Some believe one should not repeat any words in a prayer.

After a series of comments similar to many others, that the Fridays have become “tired and dirge-like” and that the choir was “a joke; people laughed and could not join in,” IH, at one point the Chair of the synagogue, noted the changes of 2009, with the lay guitarists, which made services “fun” but that it still needed direction. As one of the lay leaders of FRS, she too felt that Jacob’s job was to empower others, because of the “participative ethos of FRS,” and that all services, lay or professional, should be “pretty, musical and beautiful.”

Because she too received feedback, she noted that there were tensions. “If you come regularly, you get it; if not, you struggle, wondering where did that come from? But regulars wanted variety, something new. And now we have relaxed and informal services and the music matches the service.” She was not originally Reform, but was a member of Habonim, and thus added “FRS is like sitting around a campfire.”

In stark contrast to EA, IH spent much of her interview speaking of the impact Friedman’s music had had on her and her family. “The kids learned a lot of Judaism from us and from Debbie, even their *aleph bet*.<sup>338</sup> Many of her pieces are key in our lives. Even my non-Jewish stepfather found the song ‘Light These Lights’ moving. ‘*Lechi Lach*’<sup>339</sup> helped me when we moved to a foreign country for work.”

Recalling Friedman’s visit to FRS shortly before she died, she spoke of how it was to be in her presence. “At a pop concert, they are up on a stage, distant, smaller. But in your community, to have her praying with you, it was too much, my daughter and I started crying. It was incredibly powerful. It will be with my daughter for the rest of her life and that makes me even more emotional.”

Friedman’s music is a feature in the Reform musical world and, if FRS incorporates more of it than other synagogues, it is nonetheless, prominent and influential music, a reflection as well of the impact of Friedman’s personality. IH feels that “Debbie’s music opened up spirituality in people that they didn’t realize was there, partly because it is in English. None

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<sup>338</sup> One of her songs is “The Aleph-Bet Song”.

<sup>339</sup> A song about journeys, based loosely on the Abraham story and composed for a 60<sup>th</sup> birthday commemoration.

of it is difficult music, not challenging to sing or play, it is just ‘all there.’ It just sits with you.”

Yet, as we saw above, many remark that her music has the opposite effect on them. One prominent and knowledgeable MRJ member visiting FRS as a cross-over observer observed rhetorically “Debbie Friedman's music? Well, with maybe two exceptions, it's not my cup of tea. If it's a cup of anything, it's a cup of excessively sweet, thick, saccharine-heavy syrup. I could go on, but it wouldn't be very positive, so I'll go for the "*Netzor L'shoni Me-Ra*" [keep my tongue from speaking evil] option.” Such is the personal impact of Friedman on those within the movement, that he was felt his comments might be misconstrued as a personal attack.

Friedman figures prominently here in FRS, in part due to the close personal relationship Jacobs had with her and it circumscribes a musical sub-culture within the larger movement. WLS in both the main and alternative services rejected Friedman’s music as inappropriate, whereas at Sinai it is largely irrelevant.<sup>340</sup> But at FRS, her music is dominant - and divisive. No other composer has so mesmerized or so alienated people musically and spiritually despite IH’s assertion that “because she came here, there will be a legacy with FRS.” Friedman composed music for various prayers, and supra-liturgical songs, often in English. People indicated to me that they preferred her prayer renditions to her songs.

Tempo and style figured in IH’s comments. “The services become musically more interesting with Zoe is leading, but sometimes, I don’t want to use the word, it’s not boring, because there is nice music there, but it’s dynamically at one level. It needs more energy, but that might be the people in the room. There can be oomph when the people, the community are there.” She reflected on the reasons for people attending, what they bring with them, what perhaps needs to occur. “On Friday, you know you are taking in everyone’s stress, and for some, that can be taken away by an upbeat mood, and for others, by something calmer. And then they change. You cannot please all the people all of the time.” This comes across in her assessment of complaints about the guitars, which she believes emanates from those who

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<sup>340</sup> Although some Sinai members who are also active in the Movement and Limmud value her music highly.

grew up Orthodox, and those who both once sang in the choir, or preferred the old choral music.

She is clear what she needs for herself. “I want to be uplifted. Even if I am knackered, I want to be uplifted and held.” The words are not central to her at all. “Music is more important than words. Words are not doing it, music is. It’s because I have been repeating the words by rote for years and maybe do not understand them. It is the music that is lifting me up to another level. I am convinced that music is my way in, absolutely convinced, and always has been.” However, some words have been appealing, in that IH mentioned a few times how much she has learned and what a positive step this learning has been for FRS. What I am not certain I heard from people is that this has in reality made any difference to the music they prefer, nor the mood, nor the style or tempo.

IH is one of the few who revealed a positive choice to join FRS. She and her family were members at another local Reform synagogue where “I loved the feeling of the music of their services” during the period when the music at FRS was not good. It was a matter of debate in the family whether the music and community feeling of the other synagogue would determine the family’s membership; in the end, the family voted to choose FRS.

She is aware that musical alterations have not been universally popular, and, as her family joined FRS, others have left, or remain, but diffidently. “More people, different people, are attending, a few have walked away. Some have said, ‘Oh my God, I come and it’s different every time – I want tradition. There was one in particular who would leave, hate it all, then keep coming back. He must somehow have risen above the music.’”

Although IH injected at one point the enjoyment she had from solos and duets using a male voice and how comforting it was, RG offered a piece of commentary which was quite startlingly, and hearkens back to my observation that often the entire leadership in a service is composed of women. As with EA, he was not always comfortable with the sort of music being introduced, but attributed the musical liturgical composition and presentation to “...a sense of feminization. The new composed material, a lot of it is very nice indeed, but it does give a sense that everything needs to be gentle and wistful. Some other people have expressed a bit of discomfort when both Miriam and Zoe are up there. I feel it rather less in a way, in some ways, I am less traditional and masculine than some, but others mention it.



When asked to expand, he continued that it is not just about the music. “The whole feel of the movement has been that rather kind of ‘hey man.’ It’s not right to pigeon hole, it’s got to be about empathy, and psychology looms large. But the tradition of scholarship and learning doesn’t come into it. Psychology can be useful, but sometimes it seems that this is all there is to say about a text or a custom. A subjective feel has completely taken over, and it is as if something intellectual has to be shied away from as it might put people off.”

And when I asked if the music was furthering that shift, or just symbolic of it, he answered, “My message is the same for both – it is good that it is there, I’m just objecting to the monopoly.”

I pressed a little further with trying to understand how music could represent a more intellectual angle, and he responded felt that other musical cultures and genres were being neglected. “I suppose I mean that there should be more of an input from different traditions. On a small scale, what about a *Sephardi* bit here and there, a piece by Janowski,<sup>341</sup> other ingredients to add to the salad bowl. The feel is that they don’t want anything outside the area they are used to, as if gender diversity precludes cultural diversity, as if the other traditions are seen as too masculine. If you add some things, people fear it is patriarchal; if you add diversity, that it becomes too masculine.”

He continues with a discussion of the adult education of the synagogue, then concludes, “This is how it makes me feel. It starts by wanting to be liberal and diverse and ends with a particular feel that pervades everything.”

Since RG is one of the sceptics, we spoke about his observations regarding levels of attendance since Jacobs arrived, and his own synagogue attendance. He said that there are newcomers who are attracted to the services, and a hard core who come week in and week out, but that during secular holidays, it is far fewer. He maintains that he respects what Jacobs is doing, but that others, more traditional than he, are disaffected. “There is collateral damage.” For himself, he doesn’t come very often, and when he does, he comes Shabbat morning, as he does not like the family orientation on Friday. He would appreciate a service

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which is a mix of Reform and Orthodox aspects with both Ashkenazi and Sephardi music, led more like *davenning*.

Although this thesis is not concerned with gender in music, RG's comments reflect a continued backlash against the increased female participation in Jewish life. The Jewish world, even the Reform Jewish world was once strongly patriarchal tradition, in which religious space 'belonged' to men<sup>342</sup> and a man's voice was the only one raised in song in the services. There is still residual discomfort with the presence of, and voices of, female clergy, and the music is the scapegoat for a deeper discomfort with egalitarianism, which is an aspect of inclusivity. The music and its presentational style might be the same at FRS and at other synagogues experimenting with the same moods and melodies, but the more profound revolution has to do with the sheer numbers of women in leadership roles and the alterations in the prayerbook to reflect feminist consciousness about gender bias in language. This undercurrent may need to be made more overt if the leadership of FRS is not going to misunderstand any opposition it encounters to its musical agenda.

CM interviewed above, believes that the changes have meant that "on the whole, the older ones are not coming very much anymore. Some of them are asking, 'why can't we have the choir?' They like the choir. But they were used to the choir for twenty, thirty years. That group were more regular than they are now, and while's it's not the only reason, it's one of the factors. And Friday nights are very much for younger families, with *bar/bat mitzvahs* coming up, Friday group; out of term, some of that group come to the regular services. But the music may not have influenced them."

It is not the case that no older people enjoy the American folk-pop style that is increasingly popular here, but there is a general age rift, not surprising considering differing tastes in music altogether, and that which CM hints at, that powerful attachment to what people have been used to. But, as alluded to above, there may be other factors, such as the emphasis on the young, also present at Shirah at WLS. If so, this is ironic, because FRS has a long history

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<sup>342</sup> Barbara Borts, "Trespassing the Boundaries: A Reflection on Men, Women, and Jewish Space," in *Women and Religious Ritual*, ed. Lesley Northrup 51-61, (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1993).

of youth-oriented Friday night services, and because it once more punctures the façade of inclusivity.

For CM, “Singing is very therapeutic in a way. And singing in a service, because you are able to join in makes you much more part of the community.” When asked why that is imperative, he responded, “I think because it helps to develop community spirit, which is an important component in a service.”

When thinking about in what ways, and which types of music aid or hinder his spiritual experience, he smiled: “It’s like prayer. When it becomes rote, it gets in the way. If you do the same thing week after week, where you know exactly what’s coming, people join in, but that is a danger in services generally. I became conscious of that at Conference<sup>343</sup>, where it seemed that all were on automatic pilot. It was not prayer as I envision it. Prayer needs engagement, even though people may not be looking at the prayers, not thinking about the meaning, not sure that they know what they are singing, but simply enjoying it and joining in.”

I asked him how he gets around it. “That’s a very big question. Sometimes by reading a bit in English before you sing it. Otherwise, I’m not sure how you get around it, except by occasionally reading it in English, not singing it, which can help.” I asked if he felt others are also troubled by that question. “My guess is that most people are not thinking about it that way. They think about joining in, being part of the service, not thinking about what we are doing and why we are doing it? And I don’t most of the time either. And it’s not just about the music. The majority of the congregation don’t speak or understand the Hebrew, they only vocalize it, so there’s a nice feeling when we are doing it together, being part of the community, particularly with the singing, but even with the reading. I don’t often think that they are thinking, ‘what are we praying, what are we saying.’”

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<sup>343</sup> In the past, the RSGB would hold yearly conferences, generally in Harrogate, which some 400 people would attend, including the one, showcase service. It would be a service quite unlike those to which FRS aspires. And one year, FRS members took over the organization of the Conference, injecting Finchley-like modes into the proceedings, including the style of service.

This is an interesting observation in a synagogue whose rabbi insists that ninety-five percent of the service be read or sung in Hebrew, underlining the emphatic stress FRS places on community and participation. It is quite an honest assessment of the situation, which is that there is agnosticism with regard to the meaning of the actual prayers, and ignorance about the language in which the prayers are uttered, and therefore, what is left is community and communal singing.

I asked why he thought people came. “Keeping up with their Judaism. Their Judaism may be to belong to synagogue, go to services occasionally and to keep up the rituals.” I queried whether that would change if there was no singing in the service, and he thought that that was possible. “Again, some of the music is very traditional. The Torah service doesn’t change very much and if that music were not there, people would be surprised.” I wondered however whether it would change the nature of the experience. “Yes, because they are used to it, it’s what they expect....I’m not sure you can leave that aside. They would become disappointed.”

The status of the choir carries with it much dissension. BI mourns the loss of the choir, or, perhaps, there is here an unresolved piece of history which she carries into the present. “Zoe is wonderful and now rehearsals are fun. But now there is no space for the choir, and we are sad and disappointed about that.” When asked why the choir continues to be so important to her, she responded:

How on earth can I answer that? As you ask that question, I can feel my eyes watering. That's how deep it is. And I'm not the only one who feels that. People are heartbroken the choir is not singing, because singing spiritual music within a religious environment takes you to a warm place inside which our everyday life doesn't afford us the opportunity of reaching. It is so fulfilling to sing with friends, to hear the harmonies, because your one is made greater and exquisite by the many, who are all in the same spiritual space. You can feel sometimes when we sing, the whole choir coming down quietly then growing, all part of each other, because all are singing together this beautiful thing. And there are some pieces which bring everyone together like *Yih 'yu* – we move ourselves, and we move others.

I note that she mentions beauty quite often, which relates to the ideas about music which formerly emanated from WLS, those qualities which are now under challenge, and that piece

of the musical clash which is about individual aesthetic taste concerning which sounds should fill the synagogal space.

BI offers unwitting support for Jacob's desire for a quieter, gentler music sometimes to be expressed. This comes through clearly when she remarks on the genre of music which now predominates at FRS. "Friday is nice, it's lovely, but there is not enough space given for quiet beautiful singing, for either Zoe to sing or space for something beautiful and quiet to be sung to bring people to a quiet spiritual space. It's all go go go go go. I enjoy some of it. But when it goes on and on, I lose any sense of quietness and peacefulness and prayerfulness in the service. It's all happy clappy. You have to have room for beautiful music. And at the moment there isn't any."

Here is someone who might very well draw what she wishes for from the classical service at WLS. And in a sentiment not uncommonly expressed at FRS, there is a desire for that which the Orthodox world does with its music. "Sometimes Zoe plays on her guitar, does a duet, like the *chazanim* in Orthodox shuls, they sing with the choir and they sing together and we don't do that and what a shame. What an opportunity missed. We would love to do set pieces with a *chazan*, but maybe this isn't modern, I don't know"

She is otherwise supportive of the changes "because that brings in a certain group that we want to attract and so I'm all for it. There's been a colossal change; many more people attend, in particular, many more young people with families. Not everyone likes it though. There are not a lot of old people on Friday night, but maybe they weren't there before."

BI is also a Lead Singer who feels that some of the LSG "can bring people to a spiritual place whilst other Lead Singers can just bring people in." She adds that Jacobs expends too much energy on training people who should know what to do, as if there is some innate quality some possess and others lack. Despite the criticisms, she is happy with the fact that there is variety in what is offered and even more, there is a "tremendous sense of joining in. MUCH more joining in. But now they join in, in Zoe's way, friendly, teaching, which is absolutely wonderful." In reflecting upon the obstructive aspect of a choral service, she adds that she feels that the choirs at Alyth are "too much of a performance," whereas upon visits to family at RBRS [Radlett and Bushey Reform Synagogue], "I could see the solos, the young people. We never had a choir director like that, not that type of person. We never had that. And they

pay the kids.”<sup>344</sup>

CMS’s name was given to me as representing one of those struggling with the new music. By his own admission, he “dips in and out of both Friday and Saturday” and feels guilty that he is not attending as much although he was not raised to be observant and only began attending as an adult. He relates that this is not just his issue. “From the group of people I would go with, many have been frightened away; that’s not quite right, they’re not as keen to go as they were. But certainly, if I had a hard day at work, I would have chosen to go on a Friday, to chill, be surrounded by the familiarity, but now, may not. For me, it is about the music.”

He represents those for whom regularity is vital in the religious experience. “I always used to love Friday, because it was formulaic, always the same, I wouldn’t have to think, could just tune out and unwind. We sang the same five to six songs each week. With the new tunes, I’m not enjoying it as much.” The need to learn many new pieces is a deterrent to his attendance. He locates some of this dissatisfaction as perhaps an aspect of his own character, “I am not good at change, must be,” but those additional wistful two words perhaps unhelpfully and unfairly cultivate a sense of personal failure for discomfort with this major cultural shift that is promoted as revivifying for the organization. He also realizes that his lack of Hebraic and liturgical skills hinders his ability to learn: “I don’t know what comes next, so it’s not easy when you can’t read it. I think it takes a long time for people to learn a new melody. So, as my daughters have done their *bat mitzvahs*, I’m not going twice a week anymore. If I were, would have picked them up by now. I think people who go week in week out, are in the swing, so it’s taking longer, it’s harder.”

CMS relates similar negative observations, namely that it has become “more folky, happy-clappy, rather than, well, I quite like some of the traditional side of things. It’s nice to be relaxed, know where you are, sing you have known for years. And there is a lot of swaying.” The change in music has brought a stronger sense of the physical into the service and, as has been noted above, Reform was never very comfortable with somatic services. One interesting point – he mentioned that Berger changed many things, but not the music, and this is where

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<sup>344</sup> RBRS is my former synagogue. Then as now, the choir leader is a volunteer from the community whose avocation is music, but whose profession was medicine. The children are paid a small sum as an incentive.

his particular discomfort lies.

He is at pains to say that he finds much of what Jacobs does is “lovely, really lovely” and that she has compensated for the loss of the choir. As for the organ, “I hated that, luckily.”

Musical accompaniment is an issue for him. “The guitars are okay on a Friday, but not on a Saturday. I don’t think it’s how it should be, I don’t think it’s necessary. I like the contrast, it works on Friday, but Shabbat should be more traditional.” When asked what he meant by ‘traditional,’ he answered:

Songs I know, such as *Oseh Shalom*, sung as I know it should be sung, not another way as we do it now. I’ve learnt everything just from singing along, so when tunes change, I can’t get it in my head. I suppose, you are going to *shul*, saying your prayers, everyone singing, that is what we have done for years. Tradition is a melody I have known for years and years, learned first at the kindergarten, taught by the older generation to the community, and those people were there then, and so I took it. Maybe familiar, rather than traditional, if that makes sense. But some of the new music you can call a ‘grower’, and certainly some do that, and I’m getting that.

The hearkening back to the ‘traditional’ and the idea of what was learned as a child is a curious one that might make sense when speaking to someone who did go to a Jewish kindergarten and did learn various melodies as a child, but CMS only learned those melodies from the founders of FRS, who were themselves melodically impoverished by their own admission, and then only over the past 20 years. ‘Tradition’ embeds itself quite quickly with melodies, in a way categorically dissimilar to other practices. However, CSM was not particularly concerned about the ‘Jewishness’ of the melodies, just the fact that he had learned them there, and had been singing them for some years. His sense of his Jewish self was connected to the synagogue’s musical heritage, however recent that was.

CSM has made some of his feelings known to the leadership, and felt that Jacobs had taken the time to explain “that there are high bits and low bits, and the music we were singing didn’t always fit, so she has made it flow better.” However, he also has some familiar critiques of the music, or more precisely, its performance: “They all seem to be calm, gentle, lah dah dah, rather than the big raising your voice, which I rather like; it all seems to sound the same.” Jacobs champions one timbre, but what many seem to be saying is that they miss

the bravura, the Majestic, to use Schiller's typology.

Despite Jacob's mission of realignment of melody and words, and the meta-knowledge the congregation is receiving, there is still a core problem: "That kind of makes sense, but it doesn't make a difference to me, because I still cannot follow." It is possible that for solid musical change to occur, the synagogue needs first to work on prayer skills; people competence in the language of the prayers in order comfortably to modify the mode of execution or shift to a different melody. For many, melody and words were fused together, and cannot be rent apart. This leaves many feeling deskilled.

CSM has a balanced view, and is aware of what he has accomplished, and what he needs further to do, and although sincerely "trying to understand the meaning much more, the tradition side of it," still longs for the ease of visceral participation, "singing, when we are singing the same thing, and meaning the same thing, this brings everyone together. The stuff we sang over the years, we just sing, it feels nice, I don't have to think..." FRS and its pedagogic process is, in essence, a tiring one and perhaps this interim phase interferes with appreciation. This is something else to be monitored.

One of the instrumentalists, TF, is delighted with the changes, as, by his own admission, he is not religious, or more accurately, finds spirituality through melody, whatever the text: "Spiritual stuff is in the singing. I can absolutely go off into a different world. That's a spiritual thing. *Lechi Lach* [an English language song by Debbie Friedman] is an example. I didn't know where it came from, but I loved the tune. So that's my spirituality, the tune. You could put in Islamic words, whatever, the tune, would still do it for me. Not the words. The Debbie Friedman tune for the *Shema* is another one I love."

The 'family' service, Rhythm and Jews, is a service in which he is very involved. It represents the musical extreme in that it is generally an all-singing service. When there was a proposal to add a Torah component to this, TF was concerned that they might "pad out the songs with more of the prayer stuff," and although he realizes others disagree, he would not be in favour of this.

He acknowledges the impact of learning from ZJ: "I never thought I would say this, but I am learning, and understand the flow of the service more, and how certain songs and tunes help."



This is a part of the transferal of musical ownership that came with the disbanding of the choir. “It changed everything, it was more empowering to take ownership. “ He attributes this to the spirit of FRS. “This says something about the ethos that is about, even down to the professional staff. They may do a professional job, but they are there to serve rather than to control. If you participate, you feel you are part of that. It takes away the ‘them and us’ and it becomes a ‘we do that.’”

However, within the same conversation, an edge appears. “I don’t play nearly as much as I used to because I feel I am not good enough, and don’t know the service nearly well enough. I don’t know the flow and might choose what someone likes, or what I like. Now it’s a lot more ‘correct’ because Zoe knows what she is talking about, but it has lost some of its informality, I think the word is ‘earnest,’ perhaps losing the sense of ‘fun.’” ‘Fun’ is an important aspect of liturgical music for TF, who generally only attends a Friday night service. “It has to be enjoyable and that I and others get emotional.”

TF came from an Orthodox background, but the more important early influence was Habonim, [socialist Zionist cultural youth movement], which, because a Zionist movement, stressed Hebrew songs. For TF, the ‘Jewishness’ of music does have importance, in that he loves Hebrew songs and locates his Jewish life in strong attachment to Israel and Israeli culture. “I think what I am trying to do is replicate my days at Habonim. It was secular, but with the emotion that goes with singing and is a part of me, what I enjoy most. The informal sing-songs, shirim, were what I loved so much about the Habonim experience.”

He adds that, despite his secular orientation, “I have a strong Jewish identity. We do the candles, bring up the kids on Judaism, do volunteer work for Jewish charities” however, he adds, “I do not believe in God.” And thus, “the amount of Hebrew helps because I don’t know what I am singing about. That is the only good thing about Miriam’s approach; I don’t have to realize what I am saying and therefore, I don’t necessarily have to believe it. *Lechi Lach* in English? It’s a lovely tune, but I do struggle with what it means. Debbie [Friedman] when she was here said, ‘I know you English don’t do a lot of English.’ It is the tunes. I love *The Youth Shall See Visions* [another Friedman song] And Danny Maseng’s *Mah Tov* is an

amazing tune. Amazing tune. I also love folk songs, like *The Circle Game*.”<sup>345</sup>

TF has been involved in the decision-making aspects of music at FRS, and is aware of the undercurrents of discontent, but is rather impatient with the complaints. He understands the unsettling aspect of losing familiar tunes, and was himself “a bit resistant” to the changes, and overwhelmed at the rapidity of change, but attended regularly, and learned. “People whinge, whinge, whinge, then they stop, because they get used to the new way. They forget what it was like before. Perhaps when Zoe first came back, she tried too quickly to introduce too much, especially on a Friday, and lots of people were very cross. But I think there is something for everybody now, and no one is left out. Good. There is enough traditional stuff for traditionalists, for those who don’t come that often, and those who do come, learn new stuff from Zoe.”

There has been a demographic shift, and not just an absence of the older members. So too, TF feels, the middle-aged often feel disenfranchised, although this he ascribes to the nature of those who pass through various life cycle celebrations, and who form sub-groups of peers within the synagogue community, with an often “intense group thing, where you can be intensely involved, and then it stops because the kids are no longer so involved. However, he notes both that a new generation is involved, and that the theme of inclusivity has succeeded. “There is a huge injection of younger families, with babies and young children, and who feel that there are exciting things going on. Plus, Zoe is reaching out and attracting younger people who may be married or single, and there are a lot more of those around now as well.” He is satisfied that the structures in place to discuss, from committees to the manner in which Jacobs and Berger ponder changes, are helpful and retain the FRS tenet of empowerment which is so central.

LK is a teenager whose family returned to stronger involvement with the advent of Berger and Jacobs. He is not autonomous and thus attends when the family can bring him, which is usually on a Friday night. Were the choice his to make he would attend more frequently on a Friday. “Certainly the Friday service has more to attract you musically. It also has a more

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<sup>345</sup> He refers to a song sung by Peter, Paul and Mary, included in the RSY Songbook, and one of the most frequently sung pop songs during the days when FRS used this as an ersatz hymnal.

relaxed atmosphere; the contributing factor is that there is more music.”

He remembers as a child that something changed, and that the services “became more family friendly. The younger children would get up and enjoy and dance.” He has a strong sense of pride in the FRS musical programme. “I really like the music. It’s one of the things that really creates the FRS atmosphere and it’s one of the most important things about the service.” He notes the “huge influx of new music” that has arrived with ZJ, and expounds with great authority on issues to do with musical diversity, both historical and current, *nusach*, Western cadences, the quality of sound given by guitar accompaniment. He repeats what is rather a mantra at FRS, that music is an emotionally charged avenue to sentient experience and concurs that much of this language of meaning is due to the work of Jacobs. “Having a cantor makes people more aware of the importance of music. Not explicitly; it’s what she does in her role, that people expect more music and they get used to using music as a spiritual tool.”

He was affected by one activity in particular, which demonstrated Jacob’s thoughtful, educative manner as she moves through FRS. Not only does she give musical expression to their inner lives and Jewish selves, she also gives them a vocabulary with which to discuss these topics.

Zoe and Miriam gave a sermon together about one key Shabbat prayer, *V’shamru*. And Zoe sang different melodies and asked people to think about what those different melodies emphasized, meant to you, said about the prayer, affected your sense of the liturgy. She is making it more manifest. And there is Shirah, and *shiurs* [‘lessons’]; there is that opportunity to go and experience new music and things. Her being there makes people think more about what those different melodies mean and how they impact on their experiences.

LK himself is illustrative of this. He is avowedly not a particularly musical person, but now discourses with great authority on the importance of liturgical music:

Music creates a new spiritual dimension. It’s a way of having a more profound relationship with the liturgy, because of the deeper intensity that a melody can evoke. It can allow you to access the meaning of the liturgy; it makes you feel things on a deeper level. It’s not an intellectual thing, it’s more of a spontaneous reaction than

you might have to the liturgy; it's not really rational, it's to do with your emotional reaction. I think it reaches you through a part of yourself that is maybe more open to spiritual experience. And the kind of interpretation that that melody helps you place on the words can help you to understand it in new and different ways. I think it is a very very important part of Judaism and praying.

Diversity and variation are, in his opinion, "important in keeping people engaged with the liturgy, that you can have a different melody, that you don't come in and know what you are going to do, that you may do this tune and that tune." I asked if this created a sense of uncertainty for some instead of excitement. "I never thought about that, so, yes, I guess you wonder, are you going to do that one or the other one. I think that is a minor element. It is totally okay with me, in fact, it would be a positive, because I like basically all of the songs, so wondering which one we will do is pleasant speculation."

He adduces some sense of affiliation with Jewishness in music, and notes that "it has a fairly distinctive flavour, so, if you live in Western countries, it sounds different to the music we generally hear." He feels this would not be the case if you lived in the Middle East, so hears much of the music, particularly the trope, as Oriental in quality. However, "the modern music is more Western, so less distinctive. A lot of the songs don't say 'Jewish;' some of them are folksy and popular sounding, and the choral pieces as well and if you heard them I'm not sure you would necessarily say they are Jewish." He has been made aware of some of the musicological distinctions, although not in a systematic manner.

KB joined FRS a few years ago from a United Synagogue, but only began to attend recently. He creates his own musical liminality for himself and for his daughter who accompanies him. They prepare by listening to Jewish music in the car, to get "into the mood and the spirit." He attends the Friday service "for the music. My daughter couldn't sit through an hour of prayer without music, and she loves it, we love the atmosphere and the music."

In his former synagogue there was a choir and a *chazan*. It felt to him that "people were singing at us" and that it made the service overly long, whereas now, at FRS "the musicians and singers are there to allow people to communicate in prayer and music." He describes another aspect of the Reform debate on the cantor, an aversion to the older model of *chazanut*, with often turgid, extended melismatic passages, particularly when there is a choir

available to interject responses and add harmonies. This model of *chazanut* extends a service. The Reform model of cantor locates the cantor's primary function during a service as leading song and perhaps singing occasional solos. In an Orthodox synagogue with an indulgent cantorial style, the congregation may very well exert most of its energies on conversation, hence, shorter, time-bound services historically and contemporarily are regarded by Reform Jews as aids to concentration and decorum.

KB privileges participation when speaking about the function of music. "It is there to aid participation. I'm pretty clear it shouldn't just be there for people to listen to. Occasionally the odd prayer needs a clear vocal soloist, fair enough...I remember an *Adonai, Adonai*, I had tears in my eyes. I knew I couldn't participate, but I didn't mind, it was so lovely and beautiful to listen to. But not all the time."

KB was a regular at his US synagogue until he was twenty five, but "I cannot remember one time that I was spiritually uplifted." Why then did he attend. His response was because of "habit and tradition." This is particularly significant. He moved to FRS because it was nearby and, with a converted wife and thus children not recognized as Jewish in the *shul* in which he *davvened*, he had to make the shift.

"Habit and tradition." These are two expressions not uttered by another interviewee, which is not to say that some of them feel an overriding obligation, nor that there may not be others not interviewed who do feel that, however, 'habit and tradition' are values totally divergent from those of most Reform attendees, whose focuses would be "enjoyment and spirituality." KB attended services that did not fulfil religious needs, but did fulfil Jewish ones and, as well, connected him to his friends who also attended.

He finds the service at FRS "magical," and has served on various committees and Council since joining, but attendance is not always a function of enjoyment. "After the end of a hard week, it is a big commitment to go to *shul* on a Friday. But it's not a chore when you are there; it's an enjoyable hour. It's ninety to ninety-five percent singing. And that is why it is so lovely at the end of the week."

Music therefore "completely aids" his spiritual experience, even back in his US days, when the music, however unsatisfying, was the highlight, and not the prayers, Torah reading, or

sermon: “Even with the US, it was about coming out singing or humming.” He attended youth group, in addition to day school, and those childhood melodies and songs still reverberate in him. “Feeling comfortable with the music is a part of my Jewish identity.”

Unlike others mentioned above, he found that the inclusion of the whole of the body Jewish at a Reform service appeals to him: “There is something quite special when you see a majority of people participating and joining in, and seeing natural harmony,. I wish the US people could experience it and to see what it is like to have women’s voices, a range of voices available, all participating, together, across gender, across ages.” He contrasts this to the “sixty five year old men in a choir box hidden, singing at you.”

His comments both link us with the WLS experience, but differentiate us from it as well. WLS’s choir was described as hidden and performative, but it operated within an egalitarian community, so, despite the ‘choir hidden singing at you,’ it offers a service embracing the voices of all. The US synagogue excluded voices of women, and KB, for one, revelled in their presence at FRS.

That is not to say that there are no points of discomfort. He does not participate in reciting the few passages read aloud in English, and, although he is “used to the instruments, from time to time it feels a bit odd.” He still struggles with many things, including the necessity of driving to synagogue on Shabbat and festivals, however, the musical aspects of the service, when balanced against the other less comfortable compromises he is making with his religious commitments, does balance it out. He has gained a service that offers him the missing emotive factor, even while sacrificing some of the obligations of an observant Jew. He was motivated by the needs of his family - his wife, the convert and his children. In keeping with an oft-cited remark about Judaism, that it is for the children, much of the last part of the interview revolved around his daughter. “She enjoys it and because she loves it, I enjoy it even more. She likes certain melodies, and because she is a creature of habit, the more she gets to know a melody, the more she likes it. Even though she is absolutely shattered on a Friday, she wants to go all the time.” This type of service, and Rhythm and Jews are for him good entry points for the children, to engage them and help them to become accustomed to attendance.

KB's last comments reflected on the sum of the FRS experience. There is potential for growth, he feels, "not miraculous potential, but, some, for people who *shul* hop and then come to FRS and have that experience of the music. It's a positive thing, to make the music a beacon that might just draw people in who don't normally go to *shul*." Music is the x-factor for FRS, "music, not the friendliness, because I am still hearing horror stories about that." And then he adds, "I think it will work if the team stays together." This is an interesting comment to utter at FRS, a synagogue that prides itself on its lay capabilities, that perhaps it is the professional team that will determine the future growth of the congregation.

## 6.8 Summary

FRS presents a model of Shabbat service leadership which is common in North America, but rare in the UK, namely, the presence of two co-equal partners in the enactment of the service rituals, one who holds the brief for the music and one for the recitations. As at Sinai, this is a synagogue which has almost completely dispensed with its choir, but here, music is accorded the highest respect within the service.

FRS has a long-standing and deeply entrenched ethos of dissection and discussion, the whole within a synagogue that has an extremely vocal and participatory democracy. Furthermore, its culture is one of thoughtful practice; as a consequence, preparation for services occupies a great deal of time for both Berger and Jacobs, and how services are executed is of profound significance, both for them and for the synagogue.

The dual responsibility allied to close cooperative planning means that the difficulties of WLS in sharing the role are dissipated and, because of the prominence the two clergy give to effective services, there is an even greater sense of consistency than at Sinai.

Unlike both other synagogues, FRS under Jacobs is a music-learning congregation. In both formal and informal contexts, the congregation confronts musical thematics and is given both the vocabulary to understand and speak about music, and a diverse music with background information. There is a consciously structured shape to the service and its music, which, in aspires to achieve the desired effect, carefully marking the details of tempo, range, accompaniment and all such auxiliary concerns. All of the above is a clear demonstration of

what can be achieved in a synagogue that valorises music and is prepared to invest in a Jewish liturgical and musical expert.

The style of the services, although consciously varied, nonetheless, will not appeal to everyone. FRS prefers energetic, modern services, and there are few openings for contemplation and quietly listening as emotions waft over one. There is little space in general for listening – the services are robust, active, with many disjunctive disruptions, more even than WLS, and one finds ones attention riven by song, background to song, page numbers, congregational platitudes, instructions, the sheer volume of alternating messages. This is a service in which one can use ones whole self, except perhaps the quiet corner that some may prefer for their Shabbat feeling. For that, there are the Cooper alternative services.

FRS may not be a prototype accessible to most of the MRJ synagogues, namely, the engagement of a *chazan*, and so, the synagogue lends Jacobs to all movement venues and events, to teach and to lead. In such a manner, Alyth ‘lent’ Bellos to the RSGB, to promote quality and quantity of music, both women supported by active members of their respective synagogues who had become the leaders of the movement. Whereas Bellos emphasized the quality of the performance of the music, some increase in repertoire, and some thoughtful reflection, Jacobs promotes not only larger repertoires but also dramatically different repertoires at that. She does offer thoughtful reflection, with her primary emphasis not on heritage, but on the match between words and music, and she targets not only the choir and music directors, but the rabbis and rabbinical students as well.

Jacobs is constrained by the consensual FRS manner, unlike Morris, and even unlike WLS where the leadership generally allows the musicians a fairly free rein, so it is not certain where she would take things were she to be allowed more personal latitude. And it is also not clear that her efforts will still all dissent at FRS, and effect a major musical revolution throughout the movement, or even that it should.



## **CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSION**

### **7.1 Summing Up**

This has been a holistic historio-contemporary ethnographic journey through musical Anglo-Reform Judaism to understand the nature of Reform in Britain, both where it has been and where it may be going. Throughout, music has served as a vehicle for exploring this movement, because historically and contemporarily, musical transformation has been central to the reforming process and provided a barometer of Reform Jewish beliefs.

I have concentrated on six main areas of research. One was the establishment of the musical culture of the movement and its dissemination throughout what eventually became a movement; two, the relationship between music and modes of existing in British life; three, the function of music in Reform religious life; four, musical change and its implications for contemporary Reform Jewish adherence; five, the lines of decision-making in the congregations and within the movement. The sixth was the implicit project of understanding the nature of Anglo- Reform Judaism itself.

### **7.2 Early Reform – Some Conclusions**

Musical alterity betrayed the early emancipatory Jews; musical appropriation, left largely in the hands of non-Jewish musical professionals, allowed early Reform Victorian Jews to unify two realms. One was the British realm, and the other was the space in which they could be Jewish, for these founding fathers retained an allegiance to Judaism, albeit only an adapted Judaism, in which tension was diminished, and therefore, could ease their integration into life as British citizens. This, coupled with disquiet over the condition of services at Bevis Marks, led to the foundation of West London Synagogue, and a wide-ranging emendation of music, liturgy, and style.

The early Reformers evinced little interest in developing a systematic understanding of Reform Judaism and or Reform music. There was indifference to the musical traditions,

Sephardi or Ashkenazi, of synagogue chant, and the performative aspects of the new synagogue were entrusted in great measure to non-Jews, who produced beautifully wrought music for choir and organ, in a Western classical style, ensuring that the first music of the British Reform world was compatible with trends in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Christian liturgical music and similar in form and presentation to that which one could hear in a church. As Mendelsohn noted, "...of all the high European arts music held out the greatest prospects for successful acculturation and integration into European society,"<sup>346</sup> this music concretely articulated the project of Anglicization, the British of the West London Synagogue of British Jews.<sup>347</sup> Beyond this, these early reformers did little to asseverate a unique mission.

British Reform modifications were processual rather than dramatic, in striking contrast to reform on the Continent, except in the case of music, where the obverse applied; German reform music was often more 'conservatively' transformed, the westernizing functioning as a integument around the core *nusach*, conspicuously absent in the music of Verrinder. It may be that the process of westernization within the Sephardi world had already been so entrenched in their habitual music, that most of the initial WLS members were already quite estranged from traditional liturgical music. In many synagogues in Germany they preserved the integument of this Jewish musical heritage, and many reform synagogues employed *chazanim*, enhanced by choir and organ accompaniment, but nonetheless, placed at the centre of the service. The great German cantors attracted non-Jews to the services, through the beauty of their voices and through their music. In Britain, non-Jews drew musicians out of the Jewish world, although not generally as Jewishly-inspired musicians – they gained their accolades when writing for the general public or when their music was performed in churches. There is pride in the migration of *Yigdal* to Leoni; in Vienna, there was pride in the acclaim enjoyed by Sulzer. However, the early British reformers developed a visceral distaste or even antagonism to the idea of Jewishly musical expertise in the form of *chazanim*. Therefore, Reform never developed its own indigenous Reform musical heritage – what religious creativity it evinces finds expression in its contemporary liturgy. This is an appropriating community with a polycephalic head, looking to various others against which

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<sup>346</sup> Mendelsohn, "On the Jewish Presence," 6.

<sup>347</sup> Israel Zangwill satirized this drive to become 'English' in a poem, quoted in Howard Cooper and Paul Morrison, *A Sense of Belonging: Dilemmas of British Jewish Identity* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), 76.

to identify itself - the USA, LJ, the Orthodox, rarely able clearly to situate itself. Its music is a reflection of that and an illustration of that. There have been virtually no notable composers, nor novel and creative musical trends that contributed to the wider Jewish community. It was never ambitious on behalf of its Judaism; in fact, one could say that its advocates were fairly easily satisfied with minor amendments, and quickly sank into liturgical and compositional stasis. Its music developed haphazardly, was derivative and reactive, not an ideological vehicle for modernizing the Jewish world, *a posteriori*, not *a priori* – it mimicked rather than innovated.

### 7.3 Enter a New Melody

The WLS repertoire disseminated throughout the movement as new synagogues requested musical assistance and opuses from WLS, amplified by The Blue Book, until the influx of the refugee rabbis; with their treasured German reform volumes of Lewandowski and Sulzer, they transformed British Reform music.

Why did this music in many respects supplant the other? I can only speculate. Perhaps it sounded more intuitively ‘Jewish,’ based as it was on German *nusach*, even though clothed in Western harmonic style. Perhaps it was perceived as more enduringly, palpably, the finest exemplar of reform music. Perhaps it is because it arrived in the more accessible form of modern printed musical texts that one could purchase. Perhaps because both Lewandowski and Sulzer had composed complete services, and this permitted the replacement of the syncretic melange of a musical heritage of WLS with a coherent musical liturgical flow. And perhaps because ultimately, the British, including the Reform Jewish world, value more that produced by others, whether non-Jewish, or non-English. One German Jewish refugee in comparing Verrinder and Lewandowski found Lewandowski “more heartfelt, as if Verrinder represented English politeness compared with Continental seriousness or something of that nature. It had more depth to it, it spoke more to people.”

For whatever reasons, this repertoire extended its tendrils, and established itself as the Reform world’s *misinai* music, even entering the WLS musical corpus. Later generations do not even seem to know that this is not even their oldest stratum of music, nor that it had its roots in *nusach*. The above interviewee said that “she had no idea about any of that, and isn’t

even clear what *nusach* is.” They simply believe that this music is ‘traditional.’ They have been told that it is. Much of the music in The Blue Book, and in the indexes of the Music Committee is labelled ‘traditional’, just as the WLS books are based on ‘ancient melodies.’ The latter is often untrue, the former both ignores the multifaceted and disparate musical traditions that abound,<sup>348</sup> and the fact that, in many cases, there are composers for the different pieces. ‘Traditional’ instantiates a limited, sacrosanct, repertoire. Removing the veneer of ‘always’ surrounding this music proves destabilizing for many, who have built their claims for continuity on this base of ‘which melody; you know, the traditional one.’<sup>349</sup> There is always an emphatic stress on the ‘the,’ a preclusion of option, a securing of limitation.

## 7.4 A Community of Stasis and Agitation Towards Change

Prayers, rituals, and music established, people settled easily and comfortably into them. Anglo-Reform could be characterized as a community of stasis and stability, its motto, ‘this is what I am used to.’ This light conservatism stymies innovation, however, at the same time, it coalesced the movement around a unified musical heritage with which Reform synagogues could identify. One hears the summation, “we sing the usual Reform repertoire.” Converts, too, learn the established repertoire and in turn treat the music as if part of their own childhood memories. There was little agitation for musical or other types of changes. This very stability did allow the occasional new work to infiltrate, particularly when it supplemented, not superseded, a beloved classic, or the rabbi was obdurate and continued to expose congregants to the piece.

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<sup>348</sup> Bohlman makes an intriguing observation concerning how the Central European immigrants in Israel transformed Western art music into an ethnic music, “...that is as a traditional music distinguishing the Central Europeans from other ethnic groups.” This applies to the incursion of Lewandowski-Sulzer into the Anglo-Reform world, as well as the various Israeli and American music which is now regnant. Anglo-Reform music, from this perspective, is a multi-ethnic music, which has “...spawned equally diverse patterns of shared behaviour particular to the...community.” Philip V. Bohlman, *The Land Where Two Streams Flow: “Music in the German-Jewish Community of Israel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 11.

<sup>349</sup> Some newer melodies have entered the realms of the holy. Prior to a Bat Mitzvah, a conservative sort in one of my synagogues told me I must sing the traditional melody to *Shalom Rav* that Friday night. “Which one?” I asked. Impatiently, he repeated, you know, the traditional one” and proceeded to hum the Klepper melody.

But cultures are not stagnant, and various tropes of discontent emerged, on a variety of fronts, primarily emanating from rabbinical and lay leadership who had been exposed to wider musical experiences. S2K, Living Judaism, a proliferation of publications and exposure to musical trends from North American, made musical innovation an emergent focus phenomenon. Rabbis and their synagogues began to examine their practices, and launched both formal and informal schemes of regeneration and renewal with musical transmutation, advancing ever higher up the list of essential aspects in synagogue revitalization.

We have seen that synagogues have changed seating layouts, shifted times of services, repositioned the rabbis, and introduced reconceived liturgies. Each of these has been allied to musical change and exemplifies it, but music ranks on the highest rung and carries the greatest burden of hope for cultural transformation. We have noted the adoption of sundry different kinds of instrumental accompaniment, the supplanting of choirs, and the introduction not only of variant melodies, but the introduction of a singularly new musical entity that bears little relationship to the past. We have noted that a movement which once engaged in a collection and distribution model of musical proliferation has shifted to a more prescriptive model.

## **7.5 The Problematic of the Diminishing Presences**

Through the expanse of the ethnography, it is possible tentatively to answer certain questions concerning the success of the models of musical presentation, the impact on synagogue attendance and increased awareness about liturgical music, and thoughts concerning what this portends for the future of Reform Judaism and Reform Jews.

Each MRJ synagogue has its own musical and liturgical solutions to decreased turnout, in respect of four aspects – how the music is ‘performed,’ whether alternatives are offered, in what respect they are ‘alternative’ and in whether musical change is at the centre or edge of the congregational offerings.

### 7.5.1 West London Synagogue

WLS is, in terms of the movement, *sui generis*, both creative and reactionary at the same time. It retains the formal, professional choral with organ model of its original services and much of the same music, delicately tempered through the years with additions and deletions of pieces, and musicological variations. There are incursions of some new music, combinations of styles, and of re-placement of choir out of the hidden and into public arena. The new includes some contemporary repertoire, as well as trope and chanted congregational melodies. There are alternatives services, which take place at other times and/or other places within the synagogue, generally targeting particular demographics – families, children, young adults, etc. Many of these have their own liturgies, although both the classical Friday night service and Shirah now share a newly produced WLS Friday night prayerbook.<sup>350</sup> These different offerings meet and mingle, as hinted above, in ‘combo’ services where the difficulty of deciding whither WLS should go is avoided through attempting to satisfy all desires at once. Moves are in place to empower community members to direct more of the services, both musically and otherwise, but this remains a highly professionalized service presentation, without marked congregation involvement despite a great deal of input and even control from the lay leadership. Given that there are four full-time rabbis employed by the synagogue, WLS need never be without one of them on the *bimah*. The rabbis remain rather musically peripheral during the service, and have limited input prior to services. WLS continues no matter who the rabbi is.

### 7.5.2 Sinai Synagogue

Sinai Synagogue is the model of many MRJ synagogues. There was once an organ and a volunteer choir which led the congregation in the singing the repertoire by and large garnered from the indexes compiled by the Music Committee, the additional material brought to the movement by Viv Bellos and sometimes from one of their rabbis. With the decline in the choir, hastened by the opposition of the incumbent rabbi, they shifted to another common model, that of rabbinically-led services, in which every aspect of the service and its music under the direction of the rabbi. In Sinai, the repertoire is a modified version of what used to be there, enhanced or altered by the proclivities, preferences and knowledge of the rabbi. Once the music was no longer in the mouths of the choir and the hands of the harmonium

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<sup>350</sup> West London Synagogue, *Erev Shabbat Prayerbook*, 2013

player, repertoire was less of an issue, but it too has descended into stasis; the most marked difference with Sinai's music is the addition of a great deal of *nusach-ish*, something of the style of a traditional service. Although much more informal a governance structure, allowing the rabbi unfettered scope to lead as he wishes, this also means that fewer people are engaged in offering feedback. The repertoire is much more limited than that of WLS, as the rabbi does not prioritize musical development. Lay people do officiate at services and sometimes take the opportunity either to indulge in former melodies, or introduce melodies they would like Sinai to sing. There have been no alternative services for some years, but, as the service has many informal moments and a non-theatrical mode of seating, some of that which is elsewhere 'alternative,' is mainstream here. As of the writing of this thesis, the assistant rabbi is expanding the repertoire, accompanied sometimes by guitar, but I cannot comment as to what sort of music this will be.

### **7.5.3 Finchley Reform Synagogue**

FRS is in some respects similar to Sinai in that it, too, once had a volunteer choir and harmonium although more recently than Sinai, and which has been revived in part. Music is everyone's concern at FRS, but funnelled to one of the now two *chazanim* of the MRJ. The repertoire is not as wide as that of WLS – it excludes many genres of music which would be unpopular and out of place at such a synagogue, and further, with its strong emphasis on participation, it limits the music to that which is deemed most accessible to a congregation. WLS does not have this concern, despite enjoining people to sing with the choir. Musical ownership is diffused throughout the congregation. Zoe Jacobs offers varied educational opportunities for increasing the congregation's knowledge about liturgical music. Friday and Saturday differ slightly both in lay-out and in style, with more of the standard MRJ repertoire in evidence at a Shabbat morning service, and the guitar, prominent on Friday, strummed more judiciously in the morning. There is overt expectation that the congregation will sing and should sing, and all is geared toward enabling that kind of general participation. There are alternatives, one of which occupies the main space when it occurs and is similar in tenor to Shirah, in that it includes many musicians and highlights singing rather than verbiage, but it is pitched to families rather than to young adults, often of the same age band, the distinction being between those younger people who are married and have children, and those who are more likely to be single. The music of Friday night and of Rhythm and Jews is not terribly

different. It leans most strongly towards the American pop-Jewish liturgical repertoire, with some chanting, as at Sinai, although here appropriately chosen, even if more sparsely employed, and ‘westernized,’ in similar style to the original reform musical project, with the traditional *recitative* type of free-flowing *chazanut* rendered metrical and invariable, so that it is available to all. One alternative service resembles more closely the old standard service of the movement, with less music, and what is sung drawn from the earlier sources, and with more of an emphasis on meaning in prayer. It is led from a circle and consciously emphasizes ‘spirituality,’ but dissents from the FRS mainstream by embedding that in a fairly non-musical, less lively, more contemplative, liturgical setting.

## 7.6 Outcomes

The consequences of these changes are interesting to note, although there is a cautionary: geography, area and potential ‘audience’ are crucial elements in the design of a synagogue’s ethos.

WLS has the strongest sense of integrity in musical style, both in the classical service and in Shirah. FRS has done the most to compile a coherent musical programme, and it succeeds quite well on a Friday night, but on Shabbat morning, the musical selections continue as a conglomeration of different genres, without sectional integrity, and with music drawn from a variety of different sources. At Sinai, Ian Morris utilizes the connective tissue of *nusach-ish* but intersperses this with the staple Reform music, whether or not ‘appropriate’ for the section. People have balked against the addition of too much ‘new’ music, and some find a new melody disrupts their mnemonic connection of a text and its melody, and the emotional associations bundled with them: “...melody and rhythm are abstract nonverbal vehicles, which facilitate memory retention of text or emotion.”<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Vanessa Paloma, “Gender and Liturgy in Music: Masculine and Feminine Forms of Language and Ritual in Sephardic Secular and Sacred Music,” in *Perspectives on Jewish Music: Sacred and Secular* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 78.



### 7.6.1 WLS

WLS offers both a style of service and a community for different needs, but there is little *communitas*. Building and presentation, however, may combine to allow one to say that they do the best in establishing sacred space. Surprisingly, arriving tired on a Friday night, I relaxed into the classical service, which lately has dispensed with some of the jarring loud organ amens and lack of dynamic shading, and therefore is more calming and meditative, affording some solitude and privacy. Without the compulsion to participate, one can find some peace in an introspective space of one's own, though marred by the many instructions given from the *bimah*. Old and young are encountered in Shirah, in the classical service, and sometimes in both. Attendance is still troublingly paltry, with the largest Shabbat crowds turning out for the combo service, followed by a dinner and a speaker - it would be interesting to uncouple those three events and see which on its own consistently draws the largest gathering. But it is clear that one of WLS's attractions is the beauty and quality of the music, whether in the classical service or Shirah, and whether you wish to participate in a lively rhythmic offering accompanied by various instruments, or wish to unwind and centre yourself after a hard week, you can count on extremely competent and aesthetically pleasing services.

### 7.6.2 Sinai Synagogue

Sinai offers nothing of such comparable beauty, neither architecturally nor musically. It is a suburban, provincial congregation and attracts different ages, but this is a real community; many people have belonged for years, they live in proximity to each other. The services are routine, matter of fact, but there is a sense in which, whatever discontent there is, it does not affect the majority of attendees. Murmuring occurs in the background, but is not destabilizing. Perhaps the fact that there is no other viable alternative in Leeds ensures a kind of congregational cohesiveness and puts a brake on divisiveness. Because the rabbi engages in an idiosyncratic musical performative, there are, as at WLS, opportunities for private space within the service.

### 7.6.3 FRS

FRS is, like Sinai, not terribly architecturally appealing, but, like WLS, offers a unique musical experience. It occupies an intermediary stage between the other two in the creation of sacred space. It employs music to signal the incipience of the service, bringing *communitas* into communion. Its music is often lively and very modern, and one feels the control exercised by Jacobs. There is no space for privacy here – the whole congregation is united in song and there is an expectation of participation. As with WLS, there is great musical professionalism and competence, but here shared with the congregation. Although this has been musically the most disputatious, it is also the congregation which is most consciously using music to manage dissent. It is, however, a difficult congregation to make a home in as it is more homogenous, and not every individual will feel that it is a good fit. There are so many other, nearby options, that attending services here is truly a positive choice.

## 7.7 Matters Arising from the Contemporary Ethnography

### 7.7.1 Increase or decrease

It is clear that, despite the conviction at the centre that music must change if the synagogues are to become vital centres of prayer and spirituality, it has not been demonstrated that musical expansion and renovation has led to appreciable increases in rates of attendance on Shabbat. Certain types of services, such as the combo service of WLS coupled with a catered dinner and a prominent speaker, do draw in a significantly larger crowd, but 400, if all paid up members, in a congregation of 3500 members still only represents slightly more than ten percent. Meal accompaniments are also central in augmenting attendance. However, as the process of change continues, as the different musical selections pass by and collide, and because musical taste is deeply personal and emotionally-charged, synagogues may find that alteration continues to be contentious. Synagogues will need to avoid tendentious claims about how people feel, as per Rappaport's insight: "It is likely that everyone responds emotionally to...[an] event rather differently, for each person brings a uniquely conditioned emotional and rational constitution to it."<sup>352</sup> The interviews have strongly demonstrated that some aspects of this musical shift have not been universally welcomed.

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<sup>352</sup> Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 387.

‘Alternative’ services have been one response to the problematic of attendance. However, it is interesting that none of them meet weekly, which may preclude the establishment of a true sense of commitment and the development of customs, melodies, all that constitutes a heritage. FRS privileges one of the alternatives by inviting it to become the main service on some occasions, and WLS purports to be planning to do similarly. There is more to be done concerning the messages given by emphasizing the alterity of other services, considerations concerning locating them, and the problematic about the locus of decision-making power.

### **7.7.2 The Music of Yesteryear, the Music of Today**

The potential repertoire of the movement has not necessarily increased through these days of change. All three synagogues continue to use a layer of Lewandowski compositions with other music overlaid on its surface; it is arguably not very different from when I first arrived here in 1976. FRS has seen the greatest revamping of music, but not at every Shabbat. And even the alternative services have established a routinized playlist.

Concerning the music itself, it is beyond argument that the inherited music is generally much more difficult to sing than much of the proposed newer music. Stepping into WLS with its professional choir and organ, and its acoustically-perfect sanctuary, one hears the Verrinder, Lewandowski and Sulzer as it was intended to sound, richly-layered choral music with soaring sopranos sustaining high notes whilst underneath trained bass voices add their counterpoint. Whatever attempts have been made to render this music for single line singing, it remains demanding music, and its performance paltry in the mouths of the average congregation. And yet, they sing it proudly, lustily, automatically.

An invariable musical rite offers some ritual certitude, which further allows people to avoid the vexing quandary of Jewish belief, and one’s own, possibly tenuous, connection to it. It is in this sense that the music shifts to the centre of the stage, perhaps functioning as a distraction, and/or as a substitution of entertainment for prayer. Some mentioned as well an insecure grasp of Hebrew. Rote learning of songs is a musical mnemonic to help people participate. Both the language of prayers and the meanings of the prayers themselves are ultimately hindrances for many; music is a displacement activity for many of the interviewees. This transposition has been noted in many cultures throughout the world as in

this study of Celtic music and language by Malcolm Chapman: “...people routinely sing songs in languages they do not speak.”<sup>353</sup> He explains the immense investment of time required to learn these languages, a serious commitment most people will not undertake and which offers some parallels with Hebrew acquisition, and then concludes that “music offers a pleasant and easy participation for the dilettante.”<sup>354</sup>

### 7.7.2 Age and the Zeitgeist

There is a somewhat inaccurate impression that the decline in involvement and a craving for change highlights a generation gap. Although I found that a higher proportion of those middle-aged and older like the classical repertoire, some younger ones do as well; and some older people appreciate other melodies. What I did find was that, up to a certain age, more of those in their middle and later years retained a duty of obligation to attend services, regarding Shabbat attendance as the default activity, sometimes interrupted, but always ‘in the diary.’<sup>355</sup> Many of the younger people decide on the spur of the moment what to do on any particular Shabbat.

The Movement has invested enormous effort in researching and outreach to younger people from the 1990s, from a working party through to the engagement of a young adults’ worker, to yet another substantial investigation in 2006.<sup>356</sup> And yet, the recent JPR study, “Jews in the UK in 2013,” reported that there has been a confounding shift in the conventional wisdom, with younger people (under 40s) far more likely to observe Jewish rituals and celebrate festivals than older people (40 – 64 and 65 plus).<sup>357</sup> As I write, a former congregant whose mother had died within the year and I, who had lost my father, were corresponding about

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<sup>353</sup> Malcolm Chapman, “Thoughts on Celtic Music,” in *Ethnic Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Space*, ed. Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg Publishers. 1994), 35.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Due to physical limitations, many older people become unable to attend services.

<sup>356</sup> See reports in The Jewish Chronicle, December 4, 1998, 33 and June 23, 2006, 30.

<sup>357</sup>

[http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR Jews in the UK in 2013 NJCS preliminary findings.Feb.%202014.pdf](http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR%20Jews%20in%20the%20UK%20in%202013%20NJCS%20preliminary%20findings.Feb.%202014.pdf), 11.

*Yizkor* [memorial service] for last day Pesach. He was not attending, he wrote, preferring to spend the day (with other Jewish friends, he added!) in the country. “My mother always said she felt nearer to God in the countryside, with all its natural beauty, than in a *shul*.” Although he and his wife, both in their mid-sixties, maintain synagogue membership, the parents did not. The parents had spiritual encounters unmediated by synagogue worship, whilst my congregant arrogated to himself the right to decide where to spend that day and how to find meaning in it. All who live in certain times are affected by those times, and there is no way to prognosticate solely on the basis of age. There are missing Jews. Full stop.

### 7.7.3 My Own Private Collection

In the 1950s, Heschel sagaciously noted that “music is a serious pretender to the place of religion in the heart of man, and the concert hall is to many people a substitute for the synagogue...[which] may...foster a spirituality without a commitment and render a greater service to the advancement of concert music than to the enrichment of synagogue worship.”<sup>358</sup> In the loosely fettered Jewish lives of Reform Jews, it is not only diverse activities that lay claims on people’s time and attention, but also a plethora of musical choices no longer constrained by venue: “...The availability of a wide variety of musical styles and access to recording and distribution are important in that they give people increasing opportunities to select, construct, and express through music a vast range of possible cultural identities...one of the notable developments...has been the increasing involvement of young people as producers of their own sounds and environments.”<sup>359</sup> Meaning-through-music is now within the purview of everyone who has access to multiple musical arenas. If “music is replacing religion,”<sup>360</sup> if “personal-stereo use substitutes or supplements the home....as a

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<sup>358</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Vocation of the Cantor” in *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence*, Abraham Joshua Heschel (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 247.

<sup>359</sup> Peter J. Martin, “Music, Identity and Social Control” in *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music*, ed. Steven Brown and Ulrik Volgsten (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 66.

<sup>360</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/music-news/7511834/Music-is-replacing-religion-says-academic.html>

creator of private space, conceptualized phenomenologically as a ‘sanctuary...’<sup>361</sup> then here is a further tempering of public worship; if you can compile your own playlist from a wide swathe of available music, music you might personally find transports you to a spiritual state, then what can a synagogue do to entice you to listen to their choices for you?

## 7.8 Who Are We?

In the UK, the derivative, appropriatory trend continues, with a shallow reliance and identification on the USA, its music, its professionals, its examinations of Jewish identity; for example, UK Reform rabbis spent much time online dissecting and discussing the Pew Report on American Jewry and responses to it.<sup>362</sup> There is regular UK attendance at URJ and CCAR conventions and from April through July, 2014, there were no fewer than four different American scholars or teachers lecturing for the MRJ and the LBC.<sup>363</sup> A recent Movement communique contained an attachment with the core ideas from the new S3K book by Ron Wolfson, for perusal and discussion with synagogue chairs at movement level. This diffidence deflects attention from developing and funding autochthonous scholars, *chazanim*, and composers, firmly grounded in UK Reform history and culture. Rabbi Dr. Deborah Kahn-Harris, Principal of LBC, has six to twelve reasonable candidates for the cantorate, and qualified staff to teach in such a programme. However, the Movement will not give financial support for this innovation. The MRJ would be all the richer if it had a richer understanding of its own heritage, unique history and culture, and found means to support a native Reform Jewish musical life, with genres of music and styles of service which arise out of British Jewish sensibilities and **which make sense here**.

## 7.9 Reform A Priori or A Posteriori

Did Reform Judaism create Reform Jews, or did Reform Jews fashion Reform Judaism. Is ‘Reform Jew’ an *a priori*, that is, pre-existing typology, or was ‘Reform Jew’ created *a*

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<sup>361</sup> Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 157.

<sup>362</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>.

<sup>363</sup> One of these is Lawrence Hoffmann.

*posteriori*, after the construction of such a movement. Jack Wertheimer asks in his article surveying American Reform, “...was American Reform built upon a structured ideology—on strongly held principles—or did it primarily reflect a series of pragmatic adjustments to the shifting scene?”<sup>364</sup> UK Reform demonstrably reflects the latter, and over the past few years, has undergone consultative processes in order to define itself more clearly. It has established a mission:

### **The Movement for Reform Judaism’s mission:**

To enable the growth of a vibrant Reform Judaism, inspiring individuals and communities with Reform Jewish values and traditions, and elaborates on the core values it includes in this mission:

#### **Our core values:**

- **Creating** inclusive, egalitarian communities, valuing difference
- **Bringing Holiness** into the world by seeking meaning in our lives and a just society for all
- **Treasuring** the autonomy of the individual, Jewish tradition and the insights of the wider world<sup>365</sup>

These are incredibly thinly described, hardly constituting anything approaching any of the great Reform platforms from Germany and subsequently, from North America, nor the embracing nature of Torah and *mitzvot*, emanating from the Orthodox world. They are general, liberal in tone without, however, committing to any particular means of activating these values, and thus, offer a firm ‘yes’ to Wertheimer. With its manifest objective of capturing the middle ground in Anglo-Jewish life, itself amorphous and non-ideological but maintaining a mild affiliation with United Synagogue, Reform has forced itself into the form of a movement, but without any clear ideology.

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<sup>364</sup> <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/what-does-reform-judaism-stand-for/>

<sup>365</sup> <http://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/about-us/our-core-values.html>

Wertheimer sums up the two philosophical premises upon which Reform stands, and notes their shortcomings: “Inclusiveness...has brought a number of short-term gains...while exacting a very high price in unintended consequences. So has the...stress on the principle of individual choice.”<sup>366</sup> These principles are to be found above, on the UK Reform website as well. But Wertheimer makes the same fatal error that others make. He lodges the problematic within the organization. “For one thing, by emphasizing autonomy, Reform Judaism has inadvertently weakened the commitment of many of its adherents to the collective needs of the Jewish people.”<sup>367</sup> He draws parallels with the weakened status of liberal Protestant movements and ask “But for how long will significant numbers of people continue to be drawn to, or stick with, a religious movement that cannot or will not define standards for committed living, and that, except when it comes to political imperatives, has self-consciously shunned the very notion of imperatives?”<sup>368</sup>

This is to argue, however, that Reform can be an *a priori* force in cultivating Jewish commitment, and it is the same gentle mistake that S2K makes. In actuality, Reform is *a posteriori*. There is little chance that there will be a major shift in outlook amongst the majority of Jews, inculcated with the values of liberalism - the principles of autonomy, personal choice, freedom and equality, all of those qualities that congregate under what Cohen and Eisen have termed “the sovereign self...the ultimate arbiter of Jewish expression.”<sup>369</sup> We know, and Wertheimer attests to it, that rabbis who make even tentative dogmatic stands on matters of Jewish practise command little respect and in America often find themselves unemployable. Within the UK, rabbis who will or will not perform interfaith blessings, or gay/lesbian commitment ceremonies or marriages find themselves in struggle with the laity and it is possible that these will prove determinative in future employment.

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 184-185.



Organizational stances will not affect those who are members of Reform synagogues – those who want stronger structural positioning often transfer to Masorti synagogues, and those who seek robust ideological commitments to primary liberal values will affiliate with Liberal Judaism – and these choices are only possible in the few places where multiple synagogues of varying hues abound. Reform is reactive; in those places where there is a choice of denomination, people may not choose to be involved in a Reform synagogue that runs a Masorti-style service, or, on the other hand, whose rabbi refuses to officiate at a mixed faith wedding. This is not why they come to Reform. They seek in Reform a Judaism that rests lightly upon the rest of their lives. Synagogue is a temporarily constituted environment that is part of a larger portable culture in which Jews operate. To examine what happens at Shabbat services is to understand only a small part of what it means to be a British Jew today and, no matter what the music, it will still constitute only a small part, if any, of most contemporary British Jewish identities. For many others, the synagogue of choice will be a broadly based *shul* marrying the needs of people who eat *traif* outside the house, those who eat in inside the house, and those who would never touch it. Affiliation can be pragmatically dictated by availability. That changes the nature of the discussion for this country

Wertheimer cites statistics indicating a decline in Reform membership. The last Board of Deputies report on synagogue membership demonstrated a stagnation in affiliation to the MRJ, even if it remains the second largest movement. All of this unfolds in the context of the shrinking UK Jewish population. You likely cannot “lock the stable door after the horse has bolted.” Progressive Judaisms need to continue to be overtly accepting and reactive if they wish to continue to “be in business.”

Reform is a response to modernity, not its creator. What has emerged clearly from the ethnography is that the musical change arrived after the fact, an element of, even the key element, in amending services to stem dissatisfaction. It did not create the context. It is low grid and group;<sup>370</sup> it declares that ‘Reform is a verb,’ it is protean Judaism, trailing contemporary trends and attempting to respond; it is, therefore, *a posteriori*. Higher grid and group Judaisms begin *mutatis mutandis*; they are, therefore, *a priori*. These forms of Jewish expression appeal to those who affiliate because they truly satisfy needs both created and inherited, a manner in which to express belief in a transcendent being, God, through a

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<sup>370</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*.

prescribed set of ritual acts constitutive of a comprehensive way of life, that, because it necessitates proximity to synagogue, creates close-knit community. This is rarely if ever a description of a Reform synagogue.

### **7.10 Shabbat time and place redux**

We have seen through the interviews that Shabbat generally remains an event of space, and not of time, and not simply for the congregation. I did not once hear a sermon about home-based observances in my travels, and although there was some emphasis on the informing facet of ‘informed choice,’ the corollary, adjuring the congregation to make thoughtful choices about their Shabbat pursuits was absent. Through my ethnography, visits to other synagogues, and informal conversations, I have observed that there are few differences between the time-space Shabbat of lay Reform Jews, and those of the Rabbis and musical leaders. There are rabbis who rarely attend services; there are rabbis who shop on Shabbat afternoon; there are congregational soloists who engage in secular employment on a Friday night. Rabbis and musical leaders and their communities are perhaps only mildly differentiated. This corroborates the contention that Shabbat will happen in a place at a set time, but prior to, and immediately thereafter, regular life will reassert itself.

Reform concerns are bound up with the visible, the apparent and the public. We face our congregations, and we note who is there, concluding that, if they are absent from synagogue, they are ‘missing.’ Perhaps they are. But the JPR report suggested that they may only be excusing themselves from synagogues and are to be ‘found’ at home, observing and keeping the Sabbath day, reinstating Sabbath as a “palace in time.”

## 7.11 The Return of *Ruach Hakodesh*

If the homely-observant is to be enticed back into the synagogue, then it is the other aspect of the JPR findings that needs attending to: the search for spiritual connection.

The services I have attended have engaged me in a series of bopping head movements, and a skittering progression of push-pull between explication, instruction, off-hand remarks, sermons, talks, and music. It is sometimes quite dizzying, and leaves me feeling bemused as to what exactly the *shlichei tzibur* want me to feel. I cannot rest comfortably in any mode and I leave feeling unsettled and dissatisfied. Some of my interviewees touched upon this as well.

Thomas Day's masterful examination of Catholics and music frequently alludes to shared liturgical conundrums. He writes of 'de-ritualization,' of entering a church for a sacrament, and being delivered messages which contradict the expressed purpose of the congress. For him, it begins with a 'good morning' greeting: "The church building, the music and the celebrant...all seem to say, "This is a ritual, an event out of the ordinary." Then "Good morning" intrudes on it...Good morning at the beginning of a ritual quickly and effectively de-ritualizes it."<sup>371</sup>

When we rabbis and lay leaders chatter, explain, stop and start, laugh, *kibbitz*, do we signify that what we are undertaking is not a spiritual event? The need for a cohesive blended service is what drives many people to synagogues whose philosophies may not otherwise be congruent with theirs – many Reform rabbis *daven* in Masorti *shuls* when not on duty, finding the other synagogues of their movement bereft of pneuma. Sinai Synagogue came the closest to creating an unbroken sequence of prayer into which one could sink and pray undisturbed.

We acknowledge that there is a serious incongruence between belief and liturgical assertion, but one putative explanation for this and the relative preponderance of agnosticism amongst Jews vis-à-vis other groups is the intense focus on that which can be perceived foremost by the mind, the intellect. We forget that "...speech becomes as music...This function of language...provides further evidence that effective linguistic expression in a religious setting

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<sup>371</sup> Thomas Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2013), 39.

may not depend totally on the transmission and accurate reception of the cognitive portion of the message.”<sup>372</sup> As Day remarks, “What draws us into the collective spirit of liturgy is not a logical, scientific, theological presentation of its meaning, but rather, the faith expressed as poetry...the meaning of it all will constantly elude our mere human understanding.”<sup>373</sup>

Perhaps we who are leaders ought thoughtfully to follow Rudolf Otto, to make it “...our endeavour to suggest this unnamed Something to the reader as far as we may, so that he may himself feel it. There is no religion in which it does not live as the real innermost core, and without it, no religion would be worthy of the name.”<sup>374</sup> This he terms the numinous, the holy, aroused by what he calls ‘fascination’ and Heschel terms ‘amazement.’

Thoughtful personal ontological investment in the endeavour of prayer may model engagement and invites participation. Some of the rabbis to whom I spoke confided that the presentation of a service obviates against their own *kavanah*, but just possibly this is where we need to begin. Mark Slobin, in his epic ethnography of the American cantorate, quotes one cantor who observes, “As a cantor, you cannot be responsible for what the congregation feels. That’s not your job. Your job is to be responsible for what you are feeling...and saying.”<sup>375</sup> He is not oblivious to the discouragement that many cantors feel at the diminished presence and ardour of congregations, but affirms that “...anyone who agrees to stand up and lead services is in some way inextricably linked to a long change of service-builders and soul-stirrers, [and] must have a self-conception as “chosen voice.”<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Brent Sutton, “Speech, Chant and Song: Patterns of Language and Action in a Southern Church” in Ruel W. Tyson, Jr., James L. Peacock, and Daniel W. Patterson, editors, *Diversities of Gifts: Field Studies of Southern Religion* (Urbana& Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 1998), 165.

<sup>373</sup> Day, *Why Catholics Can’t Sing*, 53.

<sup>374</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1928), 6.

<sup>375</sup> Mark Slobin, *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 176.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

I observed frequent lapses of concentration and involvement in those leading services, time spent viewing the ‘audience’ from the vantage point of an outside officiant with concomitant lack of engagement with the actual text of the liturgy. People sang either without expression, or with feigned robustness, which appeared to be more about stimulating the congregation then reflecting an inner jubilation. I observed many behaviours of distraction and preoccupation. With Day, I found that “rarely was there an atmosphere of deeply prayerful involvement.”<sup>377</sup>

I do not intend to impugn the inner motivations of any of those leading services, only to comment that the messages imparted circumscribed the services as slightly heightened ordinary occasions, more *chol* than *kodesh*, more everyday than holy. Whatever music we employ may not be enough to overcome subtle contradictory messages. Music has the greatest potential for awakening a sense of awe and wonder. As Ellen Kossof writes concerning Lubavitcher music, “...the holy spark in the music must be released by opening up the song to let the spark fly upward. To open the song, the Hasid, now regarded as the song’s new savior/composer, must remove the coarse outer shell that imprisons it – usually, a text. Lubavitchers (indeed, all Hasidim), regard pure melody as existing at a higher level than speech...It is music, not text, that contains the holy spark; words, with their literal meanings and the connections to the everyday world, are seen as part of the coarse husk encasing the spark...Pure melody is thus closer to the divine, existing at a higher level in both the human and divine bodies.”<sup>378</sup> Perhaps it is not in the end significant which particular melody we use for *Adon Olam*, but rather, that whichever melody we choose is delivered with *kavanah*, hopefully to arouse in the congregation an intimation of awe and wonder.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> Day, *Why Catholics Can’t Sing*, 97.

<sup>378</sup> Ellen Kossof, *Music in Lubavitcher Life* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 77.

<sup>379</sup> Lawrence Hoffmann substantiates a different series of attitudes. In Lawrence Hoffmann, “Rabbinic Spiritual Leadership,” CCAR Journal, Summer 2006, 64, he ascribes to them three roles, pastor, priest and prophet – not pray-ers. In the USA, this is one side of spiritual leadership, an enterprise shared with those who exercise theirs within the context of services and/or through music. In the UK, most rabbis must merge these aspects.

## 7.11 THE END

Reform does not seem to have a perceptibly deep impact on shaping people's lives or inculcating decisional tension. Synagogue activities number amongst a plethora of modern recreational, 'lifestyle' options from which Jews choose. As Margaret Harris pointed out, "...the activities which [synagogues] sponsor are generally not the centre of communal life."<sup>380</sup> Liberal, secularized people will continue to seek meaning in a variety of enterprises and leisure activities.

S3K emphasizes "meaningfulness...[which] testifies to a felt connection between the synagogue and the personal growth stories of the congregants..."<sup>381</sup> One of my colleagues, told me that "we get 5% for services - but my key figure is how many we get overall in a week (including cheder, mothers & toddlers, film club, friendship club, Ad Ed etc etc) which is more like 20/25%."<sup>382</sup> The life of a synagogue is not limited to its *beit Tefilah*, and one must attend to its other core activities for the sake of building community. But for many, and I include myself, prayer is arguably the unique *raison d'être* of a synagogue, and it and its music the ailing heart of it all.

If the musical choices circumscribe satisfying services, then people may very well increase the priority they place on attending. Perhaps that is an adequate aim – and the acceptance thereof would diminish corrosive anxiety. Music, if appropriately chosen, well presented, and in keeping with the aesthetic tastes of the participants, can indeed facilitate people's journey into a liminal state of 'enjudaization,' a less ambitious programme than the wholesale revival of Jewish life yes, but existential angst about the future has led too often to vapid non-creativity. Perhaps the mission of Reform is to offer minimally-rooted Jews some opportunity to engage their *pintele yid* [inner spark of Jewishness]. At a funeral one Friday, I overheard two men discussing their Saturday morning plans: "Do you want to go to play golf

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<sup>380</sup> Margaret Harris, *Organizing God's Work: Challenges for Churches and Synagogues* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>381</sup> Lawrence Hoffmann, "Transforming Congregations: What It Needs, How It Happens, When It Works," CCAR Journal, Winter 2009, 36.

<sup>382</sup> Private correspondence.

tomorrow? Do you want to do to *shul*?” In the ‘golf-services’ dialectic, Reform might wish to ensure that ‘services’ remain an option.

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## APPENDIX ONE: Salaman and Verrinder Books

*The Music used in the Services of the West London Synagogue of British Jews, principally composed and collected, and adapted by Charles Salaman. The Ancient Melodies harmonised and the whole Arranged with obbligato Organ Accompaniment, and edited by C. G. Verrinder*

The books are poorly edited and the superscriptions may indicate differences in the approach to the composition or editing, but may not. There are duplicates in volumes 1 and 2, and that, as the books were divided into evening and morning services, there are also repetitions in the compositions. I am not trying to reconcile these, but rather, to log the ascriptions in each text as they stand.<sup>383</sup>

### Volume 1

Composed by Salaman, organ accompaniment by Verrinder - 12  
Composed by Salaman, subject adapted from chorus by Mendelsohn -1  
Ancient Hebrew Melody Harmonized and Arranged by Verrinder – 3  
Ancient melody, arranged and partly composed by Verrinder – 1  
Ancient melody, harmonized and arranged by Verrinder – 1  
Harmonized and arranged with organ accompaniments to ancient Hebrew melody  
Verrinder - 1  
Composed by Verrinder – 8, including a set of amens  
Composed by Edward Hart, Organ accompaniment by Verrinder – 4  
Chant by Edward Hart –2  
Composed by S.W. Waley, Organ accompaniment – Verrinder – 1

For the three Hallel Psalms included, one is unasccribed, and one is by Waley. The other is introduced as an *Ancient Hebrew Melody for New Moons and Festivals* – harmonized and arranged by Verrinder. The melody is known as the one used for the song *Hatikvah*, now the Israeli national anthem. We know the poem and melody were brought together in 1888, and that the melody is also used in B. Smetana's tone poem *Ma Vlast*, composed between 1874 and 1879. Some who have studied this melody believe that it is a Medieval Italian melody, known as the *La Mantovana*, which Smetana borrowed and which was probably borrowed in turn by Samuel Cohen in 1888. Others claim that it is a quite an ancient melody, used in the Sephardi tradition for *tal* and *geshem*<sup>384</sup> and it is found in this form in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Sephardic musical manuscripts.

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<sup>383</sup> According to Joseph Sussman, the Verrinder books were revised by Curwen's managing director Morris Jacobson, who was choirmaster in WLS. He corrected mostly the accentuation, and revised and deleted what was incorrect. They were altered in ink over the originals. Sussman feels that the originals were mostly completely discarded. They revised ones were printed as individual pieces.

<sup>384</sup> These are special prayers added on festivals. *Tefilat Tal*, the prayer for dew, is added on Passover, and *Tefilat Geshem*, the prayer for rain, is added on *Shmi'ni Atzeret*. [Eight day of Gathering]

## VOLUME 2

C. G. Verrinder – 37

Ancient melody harmonized. Arranged with Organ accompaniment by C.G.Verrinder - 1

Ancient melody arranged by C.G.Verrinder – 1

Ancient melody. Verrinder's harmonies – 1

Ancient Hebrew melody, harmonized and arranged for the organ by C.G. Verrinder - 1

Composed by Charles Salaman, organ accompaniment by C.G. Verrinder – 1

Composed by Charles Salaman - 1

Composed by Charles Salaman, arranged for 4 voices with organ by C.G. Verrinder - 1

Composed by Charles Salaman. Arranged with obligato organ accompaniment – Verrinder – 1

From Mambach[sic]. C.G. Verrinder – 1

Waley, organ accompaniment by Verrinder – 1

The same Psalm 117

No ascription

Arranged from Sulzer and organ accompaniment added by C.G. Verrinder – 1

Harmonized and arranged from Sulzer by C.G Verrinder – 1

Adapted from Naumbourg by C.G.Verrinder – 2

Adapted from Sulzer - 1

Ancient Chant – 2

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It appears that the following definitely stem from the Spanish and Portuguese traditions, according to Alderman:

### From Volume 1:

*Tov Lehodot*

Two of the melodies for *Yigdal*

*Shirat Hayam*<sup>385</sup>

Psalm 118 – and the melody for *Odcha*

[*Adonai Malach* – melody actually by Mendelssohn – still in use in Bevis Marks]

### From Volume 2:

*Uvaletzion*

*Vani Tefilati*

*Ein Keloheinu*

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<sup>385</sup> One of the most ancient of Sephardi melodies.

## APPENDIX TWO: The Music Committee Index

The Music Committee's Index consisted of the following *Shabbat* music. Again, as this is not a musicological thesis, I am simply recording the committee's own understanding of the titles and composers:

The 'Traditional' Pieces:

Traditional – 15 pieces, of which one is titled 'Leonie' (aka Yigdal)

Trad/S.W. Essex – 1

Trad/Verrinder – 1

Ancient Melody arr. Verrinder – 1

Verrinder and Some Further Verrinder arrangements

Salaman/Verrinder – 5

Waley/Verrinder – 1

Verrinder – 24

Arr. Verrinder – 2

Mombach/Verrinder – 2

Verrinder/Rideout – 1

Hart/Verrinder – 1

Lewandowski, Sulzer, and arrangements thereof

Lewandowski – 55

Lewandowski/Raphael – 2

Lewandowski/Cardiff – 1

Lewandowski/Auton – 1

Sulzer/F.L.C. – 1

Sulzer – 5

Sulzer/Raphael – 1

Sulzer/Verrinder – 1

Other ascribed to synagogues

South West Essex – 3



Cardiff – 4 amens, plus 7

WLS – 4

South West Essex – 1

WLS Torah service – 1

Bromley – 1

From WLS directors and organists, except Verrinder:

Salaman – 7

Rideout – 3

Raphael – 28

Rideout/Auton – 1

Dunajewski/Raphael – 1

British Composers:

De Sola – 1

Mombach – 10

Classical composers:

Mendelssohn – 1

Bloch - 1

Alyth musicians:

Elkin – 5

Sussman – 4

Arr. Sussman – 1

Bonin – 3

Doniger – 3

Hart – 7

Arr. Auton – 3

Paul – 6

Unascribed – 4

Naumbourg – 1

Da Rossi – 1

M.S. 20 – 1

Freudenthal – 1

Wasserzug – 1

Rosse – 2

Alman – 2

Weisser – 1

Rossi – 1

## **APPENDIX THREE: Additions To The Index**

Unattributed – 8

Trad. Arr. M. Cohen & D. Lawrence – 2

Trad. Arr. H. Cohen & D. Lawrence – 1

Sulzer ; S. Sulzer – 2 (1 a variation of the other)

Posner – 1

Lewandowsky – 1

Arr. R.O. Leavor (to fit Mombach version) – 1

Arr. I. Hoffman – 2

Arr. L. Hoffman - 1

Full version

Isidore Freed

Minowski Arr. P.L. – 1

Arr. A. W. Binder – 1

I.H. Goldfarb      Arr. I Hoffman – 1

Solo version

Arr. A. Blankfield

Traditional, Ed. M. Janowsky , Arr. J. Auton – 1

Max Wohlberg – 1

Rossi – 1

Griffiths – 1

Traditional Trop – 1

## APPENDIX FOUR: The WLS Hymnal

Of the thirty-four pieces published in the hymnal, twenty-five are Hebrew hymns of which only nine are in Hebrew, the rest being rendered in English. The music can be described as follows: music by classical music composers, three of which are arrangements of Psalms in English, and one of which is an adaptation of *Mah Tov*;<sup>386</sup> Christian hymns rendered in English, using in some cases the Psalms as texts; some ‘cross-overs’ – traditional Jewish melodies set to English texts; music of various Jewish composers set to English texts, two of which are settings of Psalms and one of which is a translation of Hebrew text ; and Hebrew texts with music by both Jewish and non-Jewish composers. Copies were made available to everyone who wanted it, and, initially, it was frequently used.

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<sup>386</sup> Piece sung at the beginning of morning services, upon entering the synagogue, compiled from various Biblical passages.

## **APPENDIX FIVE: Musical Decision Making In The Synagogues Of The MRJ**

### **GREATER LONDON AREA**

Bromley - Leader - usually the rabbi - and the member of the choir group nominated on the rota that week to lead...not the /'choir' but the singing. It's usually consensual, but rabbi usually gets to decide, unless asking for something the singers do not feel competent with. Professional leader for High Holy Days.

Central London – WLS – covered in thesis

Edgware - EDRS has a professional director of music who is also choirmistress, and two people who act as *chazanim* on a sessional basis,

Finchley, - covered in thesis

Hampstead, - Rabbi stands up and sings, making whatever decisions are needed for *shabbos*, sometimes planned...No choir for the High Holy Days. A group gets together for a few weeks before the festivals to practice the melodies , and anything new the rabbi has learnt.

Harrow, - We don't have a director of music, but we do have a choir leader (not professional, but paid a little) and a professional (non-Jewish) organist.

Hatch End, - Musical decisions are mainly made by the volunteer choir or whoever is involved with leading a service.

Hendon – Jewish paid choirmaster. Choir are paid – Jews & non-Jews (none are hidden)

Ilford, - SWESRS has a professional choir leader. We also pay an organist, but the other choir members are volunteers

Radlett, - Rabbis decide and lead the services, informal. There is a choir sometimes, congregational, unpaid except the teens, volunteer choir leader.

Temple Fortune – Alyth – paid Jewish Director of Music. Voluntary Choir. Cantor has begun

Wanstead, - Sukkat Shalom –This is done by the *sh'liach tzibur* together with the more musically literate members of the congregation present on the given Shabbat. The congregation has a number of tunes that have become embedded in the *shul's* DNA which people don't like changed, so there are actually a limited number of decisions to make.

Weybridge - you must be joking, musical directors? organists? Rabbi stands up and sings and make whatever decisions are needed for shabbos, sometimes planned...when rabbi introducing something new , tends to sing it for a couple of months every week....but often, it's what comes to rabbi at the moment. Choir for the High Holy Days.

Whetstone, - Member of the community - in her 30's now, but started a dozen or so years ago - who has musical training and is director of music. She doesn't work professionally in music but would like to - would love to go to Cantorial School.

Musical decisions Primarily made by director in consultation with rabbis. If there's a song rabbis would like the community to learn, they ask her to include it in their repertoire. She also leads some of the singing in the service. Choir sings once a month - usually same weekend in the month, date fixed by the choir. Means BM families can't say we'd like (less usually, not like) the choir for our kid's BM.

Wimbledon - we have a paid director of music (not paid much) and a volunteer choir and a volunteer youth choir

## **MIDLANDS**

Coventry – no response

## **NORTH EAST ENGLAND**

Bradford – Rudi Leavor chooses and leads the music

Darlington - monthly services with one lay leader, who chooses to sing what he wishes. Rabbi Borts takes four services a year and festivals. Leads the singing, chooses the music, does elicit feedback

Hull - As with every small community our music has come from a number of sources including Orthodox, other MRJ and progressive communities. Tunes have been brought back

from conferences and visits to other Synagogues and then "Hullified". Our Shabbat tunes are a mixture of traditional MRJ with a slight nod towards some traditional Orthodox tunes. Many of our hymns have two different tunes, with Adon Olam having four different tunes!

With regard to Festivals, especially the High Holy Days, we are dependent upon an external leader introducing different tunes into our Services, but, as you can imagine, many of the congregants moan about the changes to the tunes they know and can join in with.

Musical decisions for Services are very informal and it's usually the person leading the Service that picks the tunes. As our Services are led by a team of Lay Readers, the introduction of a new tune usually follows a set procedure:

1. someone comes back from somewhere with a tune that they like.
2. they introduce it into their Services over a period of time.
3. other Lay Readers introduce it into their Services
4. it becomes a Hull standard.

Regarding the leading of the singing, many of our members are not blessed with singing voices so the few that can keep a tune tend to sing and the rest mumble along. We have no formal choir leader or chief singer and on occasions the Service Leader has sung solo!

Leeds – covered in thesis

Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, - Lay leader rota and student rabbi. Lay leaders impose a certain set of melodies, although one leader reserves the right to add music he has learned from a variety of sources, including past rabbi Barbara Borts. Student rabbi does choose some music.

Sheffield - Just to put you in the picture, we are a very small congregation with about 57 members. Shabbat services are not often a minyan, but we get 30 - 60 to our High Holiday services. We have no choir.

All our services are run by lay leaders (although we have been lucky to have student Rabbis lead HHD services some years). Most of our tunes come from Sinai as Rabbi Rothschild was influential in our formation. The tunes for services are chosen by whoever is leading. Some stick to traditional tunes they know from Sinai or their (often orthodox) background. Others

bring new tunes that they have learnt (often from CDs, or from other venues). The tunes tend to be the same for Shabbat and the HHD when they are run by the same lay leaders, but are different (and new) when we have a student Rabbi.

## **NORTH WEST ENGLAND**

Blackpool - We're a very small congregation and services are generally taken by lay readers, who decide what to sing and, where there is a choice, what melodies to use. We have exceedingly few musical decisions on the basis that it takes all our efforts to maintain the melodies that we do know and use. However our technical head of music is young female member. Her main duties are to coordinate practices and to keep our music in order. We do have some special tunes for the *yom tovim* and just a limited number that we tend to use only for High Holy Days.

Liverpool - Whoever leads services makes the decisions. When I [part-time rabbi] came in there, very little music was being done, not even music off the MRJ CD, and the music that was done was pretty much the same year-round, Shabbat and Festivals, unless the service leader happened to introduce something appropriate to the particular time. This year, on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, I brought in more appropriate music for particular prayers, but much of the service was done a la Shabbat because that's what they know.

Manchester, - Choir Chairman Rosemary Taylor "M J Taylor", and Choir conductor Marion Kaufman ) who is so musical she might as well be professional), in conjunction or consultation with rabbi

North Manchester, - Sha'arei Shalom –Norman Zalud's grandfather was rabbi/cantor, Noah Zuludkowski, had a beautiful voice, a pop *chazan*, from Lida, after Poland. One uncle was a Professor of Music. Learned from Alexander Kipnes, sang in grandfather's choir. The family traditional, and learned from father and Leo Brill, and Guildhall for Operatic training. Lectured on it. He makes the musical decisions. I [lay leader] have introduced melodies, Lewandowski and Baer and my family music. Zaludkowski. 3 cantors of his family in Liverpool. There was a little organ or keyboard. Nothing sung of the modern – we are a very traditional congregation.



Cheadle – Cheshire Reform Synagogue - music we have inherited and that which music director has created. Not a concert. Known for participation. Considerable amount of Lewandowski. Israeli Music Director – She built up choir 28 voices. Weekly. Put on concerts. She composes it. Or Chadash an example. She is Hungarian-Polish. She makes the decisions – she thinks she's God, I think she's God. Congregational murmurings that she does too much. Rabbi does lead some singing

Southport - Communal singing only.

No one decides, the singing is spontaneous and the whole congregation joins in the singing. What is sung is dictated by which service number is used. This has been the tradition for many years and new members soon pick up the melodies.

## **SCOTLAND**

Glasgow –Have a choir and volunteer leader, but Not very often. Rabbi and *sh'liach tzibur* decide music

## **SOUTHERN ENGLAND**

Bournemouth – Rabbi on an ad hoc basis. I think to myself, "Hmmm, what do I think the community would like to sing today based on how they responded before?"

The only change to that is High Holy Days, where we have set music and the choir lead us.

Brighton & Hove, no regular professionals, organist for HH days – non-Jewish singer, studying to be a priest – he is expert on the music, so sometimes helps with the music on the HH days, previously helped on Shabbat; he played and sang, and would arrange music and rehearse. We would love to use him, but he is doing a course. We have a lay choir. 6-8 people. Nominal head of choir and rabbi decide what to sing. Standard Reform Judaism with bits and pieces.

Cambridge – *Sh'liach tzibur* decides.

Harlow – Rabbi leads what she knows.

Maidenhead, - volunteer choir leader, with choir present just for bar/bat mitvah (i.e. not every Shabbat and when an 'away' crowd expected) and HHD. Rabbi plus those who are lead singers in the congregation choose music, done informally on the day.

Milton Keynes – no response

Ramsgate – Thanet – Music features strongly in all services and we always seek new melodies.

Shabbat and festivals tend to use the same selection of music but we use a number of 'once-a-year' tunes for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur whilst keeping some of the weekly well-known ones for those who like to join in but may not be familiar with the former.

We formed 26 years ago and the basis of our musical development was from the RSGB Song Book for Shabbat plus melodies various members knew.

Over the years we have introduced variations and additions from more modern sources such as the sadly missed Debbie Freeman and Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach as well as some from the MRJ CD.

Southampton – We are often self-led and tend to keep to the traditional Reform tunes we all know. If there are alternative tunes, e.g. in Adon Olam, we usually have a quick 'which tune shall we use' and launch into whichever one someone suggests or starts up. All extremely informal. At HHD we tend to use the festival versions of tunes and when we have a visiting leader or student rabbi we usually go with whatever they suggest. When we have student rabbis for Shabbat we like to hear what different tunes they use.

Shabbats are informally decided with members who are more confident tending to lead on the singing.

Southend, - Whoever leads the service decides what they and the community are singing. We used to have a choir for the HHD but not for at least 9 years, I think 10 or more. That change was more 'politics' and cliques than ideology!

There are some weeks, I am told, that it is difficult to call it singing!

I am in the process of trying to re-introduce a very part-time choir for at least the HHD, and possibly for other special occasions. If I can introduce them for a handful of songs this year it would be good but we will see.

Swindon, - no choir. Sing, Lewandowski and de Rossi and Sulzer. 20 people.

Truro - no professionals. People who take the service decide on the music. Did have a course introducing music. General MRJ stuff, but some from the Orthodox sing some of the Orthodox tunes

## WALES

Cardiff – The answer, is the rabbi! I lead the singing generally unaccompanied sometimes with an organ . I follow mostly the familiar tunes in both communities though I do add ‘fresh’ melodies from time to time. Mostly it is standard Reform liturgical music, with a smattering of more modern Israeli/US (Friedman or Klepper/Freeland) tunes. The same applies to the chagim, though in Cardiff on the HHDs we usually host a singer who takes responsibility for the musical side of things, leaving me to concentrate on the rest.

Thus, in twenty four cases, it is the rabbi or *sh'liach tzibur* of the day who makes the musical decisions on Shabbat. Five synagogues have a professional Director of Music, three have paid Choir Leaders and one has a volunteer Choir Leader. In five cases, the rabbi makes the decisions in conjunction with one of the above, and in one case, the choir or a member of the choir makes the decisions. One synagogue has what it called *chazanim*, but who are not formally invested and can be described using the American terminology as ‘Cantorial Soloists.’ Two synagogues have an ordained *chazan*. In most cases, the music sung depends on the knowledge of the rabbi or shatz and much of that consists of tunes learned from WLS, from Leeds, from the movement’s annual conference, and from the choir sessions once executed by Viv Bellos.

## APPENDIX SIX: The Structure of an MRJ Synagogue

According to the MRJ website, there are forty two synagogues affiliated to the Movement, some 35,000 people, including children, which constitutes 20% of those in the UK who are affiliated to synagogues.<sup>387</sup> Synagogues pay a membership levy to the Movement, based on their membership figures and each is entitled to send delegates to the MRJ Council meetings. There is a great deal of autonomy and the congregations each have their own character and customs, a result of their own, quite divergent, histories and the influences of demography, geography, and internal leadership. The Assembly of Reform Rabbis [previously the Assembly of Rabbis], which includes all of the rabbis of the Movement and those involved in the Movement and the Leo Baeck College, debate matters of Jewish law and life, and their decisions are generally meant to be binding on both the rabbis and their synagogues. In reality, the various synagogues may or may not adhere to some or another of the ‘rulings’ but, although there have been rabbis expelled from the Assembly for flouting the rules, no synagogue has ever been ousted from the Movement. So there are differences with regard to the place of non-Jews in a synagogue, the comfort the synagogue or rabbi has with commitment ceremonies for gay and lesbian couples, the strictness of the *kashrut* [dietary law observance] or the acceptance of women rabbis.

Jewish individuals and families join a specific synagogue and pay dues as set by each synagogue to that synagogue itself. Synagogues are governed by an executive or officers and a council or board elected by the voting members. Rabbis are engaged privately by the synagogues, but paid with reference to a document proposed by a lay-rabbinical working party and voted on by the Assembly and the Movement separately. Rabbis are thus employed to be leaders, and exist in dialectical tension between their role as *mara d’atra* [authority on Jewish practises] and as employees, as well as their competing roles as leaders of prayer, pastoral counsellors, educators, and guardians of Jewish boundaries. Rabbis form a team with the lay leaders, elected by the congregation at an AGM, to provide Executive or Honorary Officer leadership, and Council or Board of Trustees and sit *ex officio* on all governance

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<sup>387</sup> <http://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/about-us/who-are-our-partners.html>. However, some movements only count the men, and it is unusual to count the children, so the figure is not entirely accurate.

committees. In an ideal situation, these two form a ‘holy partnership;’ at worst, there can be partial or general power struggles. Rabbis’ tenures may coincide with a number of different lay leaders with whom they have diverse types of relationships.

## APPENDIX SEVEN: Interview Request Letter



Dear \_\_\_\_\_ Member,

I am currently doing a PhD at Durham University, looking at the music of the MRJ [Movement for Reform Judaism]. One of the 3 synagogues I am studying is Sinai Synagogue and I need to do some ‘random sampling’ for my interviews. The rabbi and lay leadership all know that I am doing this and support me.

I hope that you might be able to help me. An interview will take around 45 minutes, and is completely confidential, and hopefully enjoyable as well for you, giving you the opportunity to reflect on things yourself. It is not a gripe session, but rather, a chance for me to find out about the meanings of music in a service. You do not need to be an ‘expert’ – just someone who attends services here. We would find a convenient time and place when I can come to \_\_\_\_\_, and if that proves impossible, we can do it by SKYPE or phone.

If you are willing to help out, please either send me a text or phone me on my mobile \_\_\_\_\_, or my home phone \_\_\_\_\_, or send me an email on \_\_\_\_\_

Many thanks, Shabbat shalom,

(Rabbi) Barbara Borts

## APPENDIX EIGHT: Interview Questions

*These were my guiding questions, however, I tended to follow the cue of the interviewee and, when they were loquacious, let them expand on the themes that were important to them. Nevertheless, I ensured that I covered these issues with everyone to whom I spoke.*

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How would you describe the musical culture of your synagogue? If you were to explain the music of your service, how would you describe it?

What do you know of the musical history of the synagogue? How has music changed in the life of the synagogue from the past to today?

What do you think is the place of music in a service? What do you think the music is doing in the service – what is its function in the service?

In what ways does the music either aid or hinder your spiritual experience? Some types of music more than others? Some particular pieces? Why?

Has there been some time in your life when the music of the synagogue has really spoken to you, meant something to you? (Memory of an event)

What makes music ‘Jewish’?

In what ways does the music reflect or shape your Jewish identity? Or other musics? Or is that not a compelling concern? What music better does it? [If the word ‘tradition’ is used, unpack that with them.]

Would you say you are a musical sort of person? What type of music do you normally listen to?

Are you a Friday or Saturday attendee? Does the music of those services play any part in your choice?

If the musical tradition of your synagogue has/will/is changing, why do you think that is so?

What is/has been/might be the consequence of the change, i.e. will people attend more or less frequently or will there be different demographic?

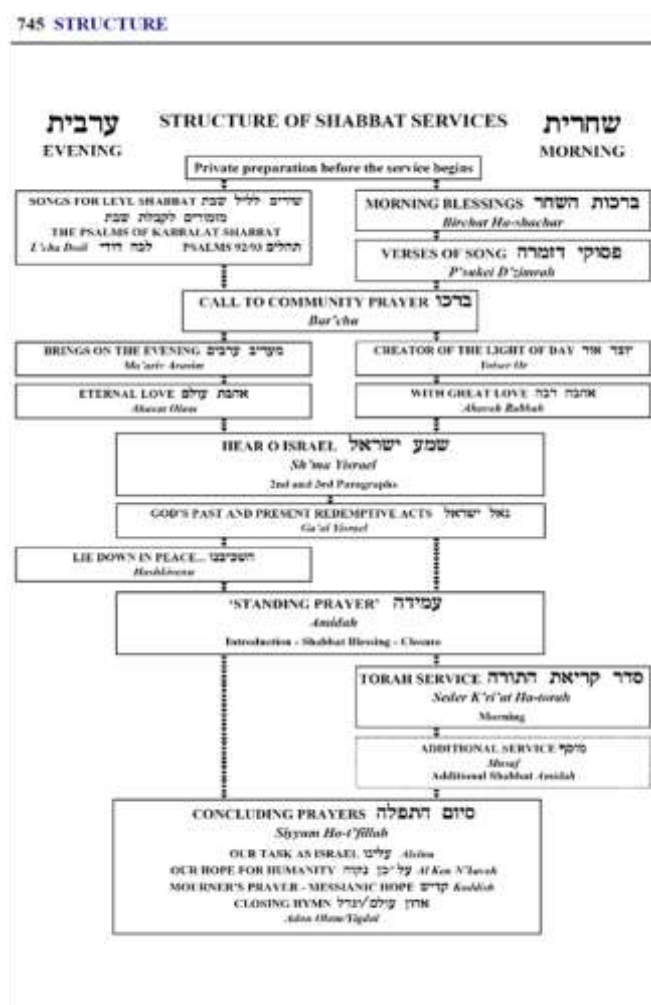
Who makes the musical decisions? Why do they make those decisions?

[Decision makers] Why do you make the decisions you make? To whom else shall I speak?

## APPENDIX NINE: The Shabbat Services: An Outline

All of the MRJ synagogues own the new *siddur* and use it for regular services, sometimes supplemented by home-produced liturgies for alternative and children's services.

The following constitutes an outline of the evening and morning services, from which the rabbi or lay leader selects the prayers and songs for that service.<sup>388</sup>



<sup>388</sup> Forms of Prayer, 745.